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BROTHER AND SISTER

1489

f. 1758

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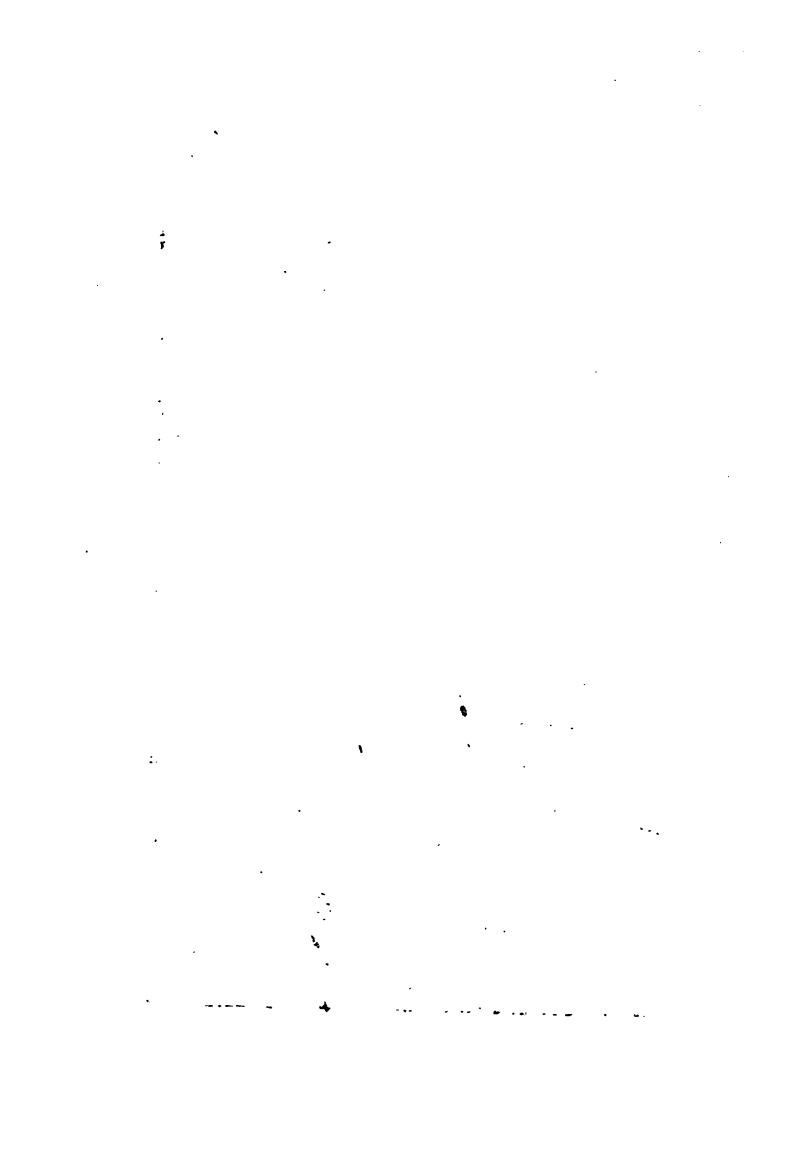


**BROTHER AND SISTER;**

**OR,**

**MARGARET'S TRIAL.**









**BROTHER AND SISTER;**

**OR,**

**MARGARET'S TRIAL.**

**AND**

**THE TWO TEMPTATIONS.**

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# BROTHER AND SISTER;

OR,

## MARGARET'S TRIAL.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### COMING HOME.

"Thy heart is sad to think upon  
Thy mother far away,  
Wondering perchance, now she is gone,  
Who best for thee may pray.  
In many a waking dream of love,  
Thou seest her yet upon her knees above;  
The vows she breathed beside thee yesternight,  
She breathes above thee now, winged with intenser  
might."—*Lyra Innocentium*.

ONE misty murky afternoon in the month of December, many years ago, a fly might be seen to turn out of a broad turnpike road about fifty miles from London, into a steep lane darkened by a row of Scotch firs that grew on either side; and the sudden jolt, caused by taking the corner rather shortly, roused up the two people inside the carriage, who, for any noise or movement

that they had made, might have been asleep for the last hour. One of the two was a middle-aged, well-featured woman, who, in her flounced dress, silk mantle, and fancy straw bonnet, looked almost too smart to be a servant. The other was a pale little girl about eight years old, in deep mourning. Her dark eyes looked graver than children's often do; and as she stood up and put her head as near as possible to the closed window, in a vain hope to see more than the black fir-trees as they were passed one after another, she turned to her companion, and after a minute's silent look, the words seemed to force themselves from her little shut-up mouth, "Mrs. Jackson, I should so like to look out now."

The answer was given in a clear sharp voice, that did not sound kind, although it was intended to be so. "My dear Miss Hannington, I told you before that I had no sort of objections to your having the window open, except on account of the tooth-ache which the dampness would be quite certain to give me. But we cannot be far from Stonesfield now we have turned into this jolting lane, and it is getting dusk besides, so I think, my dear, it cannot signify whether you look out or not, and you would be as likely as not to catch cold if you did."

The little girl made no answer. She pressed her head closer to the drizzly glass, and tried not to mind. It seemed a little disappointment, and easy to bear; but she was coming home again after a long time, and she would have been so glad to watch for the first cottage, and the well-known turnings in the lane, and the

last little hill which led to the group of sycamores in the corner, close to the gate of Stonesfield House. They had seemed to be such a weary while getting over those six miles of solitary road, between the station at Churchbury, and the Stonesfield turning. Perhaps she was tired, and perhaps she had been thinking too much, and longing too much for this moment of coming home, which now did not seem so very bright to her, for there came a swelling in her throat, and with difficulty she kept down the sob that she feared would only cause her to be told that she was a naughty cross little girl.

Four months ago, little Margaret's mother had been taken away from her. She had fallen dangerously ill very suddenly, and Margaret and her brother Alfred had been immediately taken back with him to London by their uncle, Dr. Beevor, who came down to Stonesfield, so that they knew only of the terrible affliction that had fallen upon their home by the black clothes which were given to them, and the very few words which their Aunt Beevor ever said to them on the subject. Margaret's last sight of her mother had been when she came up into the nursery as usual to kiss her after she was in bed. There was a little hymn of which Margaret was very fond, and she generally asked her mamma to repeat it to her before she left the room; but that night she did not think of it till her mother had reached the door, and was going downstairs again, and then she called out, "Oh, Mamma, Mamma, please come back! I cannot go to sleep without my hymn."

Then her mamma came back, and stood for a moment with the light in her hand beside the crib, and began repeating the words ; but before she had finished them she stopped, and put the candle on the mantel-piece, and sat down in the chair that stood close beside the little cot. Her voice sounded as if it came from far away to Margaret, lying so warmly covered over ; and when it ceased, and her mother laid her hand upon her forehead as if to bless her, the touch felt so cold, that Margaret drew it down with both her own, and said, " O Mamma, I do love your cold hand, and I shall make it warm, and keep it, and never let it go again all the night long."

Her mother bent down and kissed her once more, and did not draw her hand away ; and the last thing that Margaret saw before her eyelids fell fast over on her eyes in sleep, was the look of love in her mother's face as she sat silently watching beside her that evening.

She never saw that look again, nor felt the touch of the cold hand upon her brow all the night long of her life afterwards. For to a little child like Margaret, it must be like night to lose the bright light of a mother's love ; and it is not strange that when she was far away in London, sometimes when she was alone upon the stairs or about the house, her voice was heard crying out, " Mamma, Mamma !" like a little lamb bleating for its mother. Her cousins looked grave, and whispered together when they heard it, and Mrs. Beevor scolded her ; but still it came again, that sad low cry, " Mamma,

Mamma!" But in her little bed at night, she was most unhappy. Then she lay and longed and longed for the touch of the cold hand that could not come. She did not dare to cry, for the nurse would have scolded, and the little cousins have been disturbed, but it would have been better for her if she might have cried, for then she would soon have fallen asleep, instead of lying long hours awake, thinking, thinking of when mamma would come, and she should go home again.

Mrs. Beever had several children, and was always very busy, and she had not much time to think of Margaret; but there should have been someone to come up and fold her in their arms, and whisper to her, "Dear little child, your mother is gone away where she is very happy, and she cannot come to you; but you are not left alone; *God* loves you, and papa will take care of you, and he will teach you to love and serve *God*, that you may go and be with dear mamma at last in Heaven." Then poor little Margaret would have poured out all her sorrow, and been comforted; but there was no one to say this, and so she shut it all up in her heart, and grew so quiet and silent, that her cousins were not very fond of her, and her aunt declared, that except for that cry of "Mamma, Mamma!" she should never hear her voice at all.

One strong desire had taken possession of Margaret's mind, which was the cause of a great deal of vexation and disappointment to her. She had learnt to write a little with a pencil, though she had never used a pen; and she



longed so much to try and write a letter to her mamma. Every night she thought of it when she was in bed, and resolved that the next day she would venture to ask somebody to give her a sheet of paper, and rule her some lines. Perhaps Alfred would do that, but he had no paper she knew, and it was so difficult to find the right time to speak to him, for they were scarcely ever alone together, and he was never sitting still, except at meal times, from morning till night.

The difficulty of the paper was conquered at last by a great effort. She was in the school-room alone one morning, her three cousins, Sophy, Marianne, and Rosa, not having come up from breakfast, and on the table was Rosa's little writing-case, which was open, and contained half a quire of new note-paper, which her mamma had given her only the day before. Rosa was the one of her cousins whom Margaret liked best, for though she took very little notice of her, she had a good-natured face, and never spoke to her crossly. She would not have thought of making her request to Sophy or Marianne, even if they had been the fortunate possessors of reams of note-paper. They were so much older, and so tall; but if Rosa should happen to come up first, as she sometimes did, perhaps she would not mind her asking for just one sheet, and perhaps she might be able to tell *her* what she wanted it for. And Rosa did come up first, but unluckily, for that very reason extremely out of humour, grumbling at being sent away from the breakfast-table to do a

stupid French exercise, when papa was reading something amusing out of the newspaper, which she wanted to listen to. She bounced herself down upon a chair close to the table, and taking a very black pen from the inkstand, began covering that beautiful, clean, first sheet of her paper, not with a French exercise, but with such hideous faces as never were seen on earth since the world began, with eyes at the top of their heads, crooked noses, and wide gashes for mouths. Margaret went and stood close beside her, and looked with very wistful eyes at the writing-case.

"They are very beautiful. Do not you think so?" said Rosa, laughing. Margaret did not answer. She was thinking how to make her request. Rosa looked up at her, and half offended at observing that her eyes were not fixed upon the drawing, said somewhat crossly, "Well, what is the matter now, Margaret? What do you want? You look very woe-begone about something or other."

"Some paper," said poor Margaret, forcing out the words at last. "I want some paper very much indeed, and I thought, perhaps, Cousin Rosa, that you would give me a sheet."

"Is that all?" said Rosa. "Oh yes, you are welcome to that, I am sure. Mamma only gave it me to do my horrid French exercises upon; and you might have it all for what I care." And as she put a sheet of it into her cousin's eager hand, she added, "but what do you want it for, if I may ask, Miss Margaret?"

"To write a letter," the latter answered, in

so low a voice, that the words were scarcely audible.

"And who are you going to write to?" said Rosa; "to your papa? Because I should doubt whether he would be able to read it when it was written."

"I was not thinking of writing to papa," said Margaret quietly. Something in her way of speaking made Rosa suspect what was in her mind, and she said awkwardly, though without intending to be unkind, "Margaret, I will take that paper from you again, if you don't tell me who you mean to write to."

The tears came into Margaret's eyes, and she stood a little way from the table, holding the paper in her shaking fingers, when the door opened, and in burst her brother Alfred, followed by Sophy and Marianne.

"What is the matter, Maggie?" said the former, in a half-joking, half-coaxing tone, as he observed her face. "Has Rosa been plaguing you? I will make it all right, and plague her in return, so never mind:" and as he spoke, he suddenly snatched up the paper on which his cousin had been scribbling, and ran with it towards the fire-place. Rosa followed him in a second, and a scuffle ensued, which was not in the least stopped by Sophy and Marianne both uplifting their voices, and declaring that Alfred should go out of the room directly, for he had no business there when they wanted to do their lessons.

"You rude, disagreeable, impertinent boy!" exclaimed Rosa, with a very red face, and great

force of manner, as Alfred succeeded in tossing her valuable paper upon the fire. "I only wish mamma would come up, and see how you are behaving!"

"Oh yes; I just wish mamma *would* come up and see how *you* have been behaving, you rude disagreeable, impertinent girl," said Alfred, mimicking Rosa in the most provoking manner. "Scribbling instead of doing your lessons, and teasing Margaret till you made her cry!"

"Story-teller!" interrupted Rosa; "I did not tease Margaret. I gave her a sheet of paper to write a letter when she asked for it; and when I asked her civilly who she was going to write to, she would not answer me."

Margaret, whilst this altercation was going on, had retreated to a little table in a dark corner of the room, where she stood doubting whether she ought not to give up her purpose and return the note-paper, as there was such a commotion about it. But the entrance of Mrs. Beevor at that moment changed the face of affairs. Rosa found herself instantly quietly seated in her chair, with a French book open before her, and a pen in her hand; and Alfred coming up to his sister, wished to pass himself off as busily engaged in her service.

"Alfred," said Mrs. Beevor, with whom her nephew was no great favourite, "I told you not to come up-stairs with your cousins; what are you about here?"

"Margaret is going to write a letter, Aunt, and I am come up to help her," replied Alfred,



the dark corner, and with a stump of a pencil which she had found in the inkstand when she came up-stairs, wrote, with weak fingers and uneven letters, the words "Dear Mamma," which seemed to be always in her heart. Then came a pause. Margaret could feel, but she was not old enough to put her feelings into words; so the letter went on in the common way: "I hope you are quite well now;" and by the time the "now" was finished, the lines became so very crooked, that Margaret was frightened to see how near one end was to the bottom of the page, and laying down her pencil with a sigh, was obliged to own to herself that she could not get on without a ruler. It would have seemed a want very easily supplied, for on the table at which her cousins were sitting was a large flat cedar ruler, so covered with ink-stains in all directions as to show that it was not too precious to be used by anyone. But it was close to Sophy's elbow; very likely she was using it; and at any rate, Margaret could not take it up without asking, and could not make up her mind to ask. Without saying a word she slipped out of the room and down-stairs, to see if Alfred could help her out of her difficulty. She found him dressing the cat in his pocket-handkerchief, and so very fully occupied in keeping her claws quiet, whilst he carried on a vehement conversation with her in her own language, that he was not inclined to attend to anything else. "I have got no ruler," he said, when Margaret managed to make him hear what she wanted. "I wish I had, for then I should give this old

vixen a good box on the head. There is one, though, in my uncle's study, for I saw it on the table one day, so you can go and get that if you like, and when you have done with it, give it to Rosa, and tell her that I have sent her what she wants."

"But, Alfred, I must not go into uncle's study," said Margaret. "I don't know whether I may have the ruler."

"What a goose you are, Maggie!" exclaimed her brother. "There is nobody to bite you, and uncle would care no more for your taking the ruler than if it were the cat's tail."

Margaret considered a moment. Certainly her uncle would not come in till dinner-time; he was always out all day, and there would be plenty of time for her to bring the ruler back again when she had done with it; and even if he were in the room, she should not be afraid to ask him for it, for he always looked at her kindly, and peeled a walnut on purpose for her at dessert. Yes, she would venture it, for, in short, she *must* get on with her letter, and the lines *must* be ruled. In a minute her noiseless little feet had carried her into the study, and the ruler, a very handsome one of polished ebony, was in her hand. But now came a new difficulty. She was afraid of what her cousins might say if she took it into the school-room. It is dangerous to give way to fear and shyness so much as Margaret did, because it is apt to lead to deceit. No doubt if her aunt had had more time to talk to her, and if her cousins had been more kind and good-natured, she would not

have been so unwilling to ask them for what she wanted; therefore the blame rests mostly with them; but a little courage at first will sometimes save some trouble of mind afterwards; and if Margaret had been brave enough to ask her cousin Sophy for the old ink-stained ruler, she would have acted in a more simple and straightforward manner, and have escaped all appearance of evil too.

She had some terrors as she ran up-stairs with her treasure, for she had to pass the drawing-room door, and her aunt might happen to open it just at that minute. However, that danger was safely passed, and as Margaret bounded up the second flight, she determined to continue her journey to the nursery, carry her note up there, rule her lines, and then run down with her uncle's borrowed property at once. The nurse would be too busy to take any notice of her; and she was not afraid of her two little cousins, Maurice and Augustus, or of the baby, who would probably be asleep in his little cot. Nobody made the least remark when she went into the school-room and fetched her letter. She had a little white bed in the corner of the nursery, and kneeling down beside it, she set to work very carefully with the great black ruler; but the knots in the white counterpane were a sad hindrance; and it must be owned that the lines were very little straighter than the writing had been before. However, the letter was not fated ever to be finished, so it did not signify. The unusual appearance of such a tempting article as the ebony ruler could not, of course, escape



the observation of Maurice and Augustus ; and just as Margaret had begun her second page she had to jump up and run after the latter, who was turning it into a horse, and careering round the nursery upon it in a very spirited manner. Her efforts to recover it were stoutly resisted by both, for Maurice wanted a ride himself, and in the midst of the struggle in came Alfred, who settled the matter by pouncing upon it, and dashing out of the room with it directly.

“O Alfred, please don’t take it away!” cried Margaret, from the top of the staircase ; but Alfred was at the bottom before her words were ended ; and to her great distress, she heard him open the school-room door, and go in with the ruler in his hand. She hesitated a moment, and then determined to follow him. In that short space of time Alfred had stirred up a storm with his cousins—a thing in which his heart delighted. Margaret could scarcely make out, in the torrent of words, what it was all about ; but she stood with the door in her hand, and said beseechingly, “Please, Alfred, give me the ruler, and let me take it back to my uncle’s study.”

“And pray what business had you to take it from papa’s study?” said Sophy, turning sharply round upon her. “You are really as mischievous as Alfred, and between you one has no peace of one’s life. Alfred,” she added, with an air of authority which was pretty sure to provoke resistance, “take that ruler back to my papa’s study directly, or I will tell him this evening that you and Margaret have been meddling with his things, and running away with them.”

"Oh, please Alfred, give it to me," murmured Margaret's beseeching voice once more, and she advanced a step or two into the room, and clasping her hands, looked with a very piteous face at her brother. Of course there was no chance of his giving it up after Sophy's orders; and at that minute, hearing his aunt's step on the stairs, he ran out of the room, without attending to Margaret, and just giving Sophy an irritating tap on the head with the ruler as he passed. The tears of distress were in Margaret's eyes as Mrs. Beever entered.

"What, crying again!" said the latter, who, having more things to attend to than she could well get through, was rather impatient of unnecessary interruptions. "Go into the nursery and play with the children, and do try to be a little more cheerful; there's a good little girl."

Margaret went, but so far from being more cheerful, her tears were soon changed into sobs of grief; for, alas! in her absence her paper had been seized upon by Augustus, and the letter was scattered in various crumpled pieces about the floor. It was a deep disappointment, for though she had no clear idea of her letter ever going, to write it seemed somehow to bring her dear mamma nearer to her again. Her sorrow put the thought of the ruler so much out of her head, that she was quite startled when, the next morning at breakfast, her uncle rather suddenly looked up, and asked who had taken his ebony ruler out of his study. There were two or three voices to answer directly that Margaret had done it, and her cousins looked at her as much as to

say that they were glad that she was in the scrape, and not themselves.

"Margaret!" said her uncle in a surprised voice ; but when he looked at her distressed face, he added kindly, "Never mind, my dear, now ; only, when you take things you should be careful to put them back."

"Ah, that was Alfred's fault," said Rosa, who could not resist such an opportunity of proclaiming his misdeeds. "Margaret could not put it back because Alfred ran away with it, Papa, and would not let her have it again when she wanted it."

"Oh," said Dr. Beevor. "Well, somebody must put it on my table again now, for I want it ; that's all."

He had taken up the newspaper, for he never wished to hear the children's squabbles. Besides, he had a vague idea that Alfred was troublesome, and as he had no time to keep him in order, it was of no use to inquire into his conduct. So the end of the ruler business was, that Margaret was still more unhappy ; her aunt suspected her of being deceitful, and her cousins bestowed upon her some of the dislike which they could not help feeling towards Alfred. Yet, in spite of this, and of his being three years older than she was, it would have been better for Margaret if she could have kept her brother with her. She was very fond of him, and though he liked rough play more than anything, and did not think or care about home as she did, she could sometimes get her arm round his neck whilst they looked over a book of prints together,

or sit on a little footstool close beside him, and have a game at cats'-cradle before she went to bed.

But Alfred was sent to school within three weeks of their going to London; and as they had not been at all happy weeks to him, he was as little sorry to go as his uncle and aunt were to get rid of him. The truth was, that the narrow London house was like a prison to him. Shut up either in the two dining-rooms on one floor, where he nearly shook the house down by jumping over the chairs and tables; or in the two drawing-rooms on another, where he terrified his aunt by climbing over the balcony; or else in the two nurseries higher up, where he put his two small cousins, Maurice and Augustus, to plough, talked broad Hampshire to them, and at last lashed them with his whip till they upset the plough, and went off to Mary, the nurse, in roars of passion—everywhere Alfred was in the wrong, and in the way, and it was no wonder that Dr. Beavor, who could not stay at home and teach him, looked out a school for him, and sent him to it as soon as possible. Alfred had always hitherto been taught by his father, but he hated his lessons, and was so sadly inattentive, that the hours spent over the Latin Grammar were an affliction to both. His father grieved over his little progress, and endeavoured by every persuasion to make him learn better; but Alfred had set his mind upon going to school, because “staying at home was such stupid work, and nobody ever did or could learn at home;” and so, in his wise opinion, if he “did not get on it was not his fault, but papa’s.”

He had not one tear to give to poor little Margaret when she clung round him at the bottom of the stairs, as if she would have been thankful to go away with him to school or anywhere. But Mrs. Beevor, a little way up the stairs behind, called out, "My dear, let your brother go directly. He will be too late for the train." And Margaret rushed into the dining-room, and on to a chair in the window, just in time to get a wave of the hand, and a smile; and that was all she had to comfort her. But it did comfort her, for she said to herself, "Alfred is thinking of home, for he said that it would not be very long before the holidays, and then he should go straight to Stonesfield, and I should be there, and we should be very happy again. Oh, if I were but at home now, and if I could but see mamma!" And then there came the fixed look into her face, as if she would not cry, and the grave settled lips, that seemed as if she could not speak.

And now she was really going home. Her aunt had looked out a Mrs. Jackson to be a kind of nurse and housekeeper, for Mr. Hannington wanted somebody to look after his servants as well as his child, and she had only come to Dr. Beevor's house the day before, so Margaret had not been much used to her when they travelled down to Stonesfield that December day together.

## CHAPTER III.

## COMING HOME.

MARGARET was in an agony of expectation when they came in sight of the entrance gate of Stonesfield House, which by reason of old age and infirmity, was almost always suffered to remain open; and when the fly-man, instead of turning in, actually passed it, and drove on towards the white gate of the parsonage, she could not prevent a scream, and an exclamation to Jackson, who, as soon as she comprehended the mistake, put her head out, and directed the driver to Stonesfield House, in a tone so stern and reproachful as must have made him ashamed of supposing that they could be going to any inferior abode.

The house door stood wide open; and that of the dining-room, which was on one side, being open too, showed that it was empty, with a sulky black fire smouldering in the grate, and an empty horse-hair arm-chair beside it. Margaret could hardly stop to speak to Sarah, the housemaid, who appeared almost before Mrs. Jackson had had time to give the bell a sharp-sounding ring. Something made her rush at once into the sitting-room opposite, the study, as it was called, (one side being filled up with rows of dull-brown volumes upon white shelves,) where her mother used to sit. There was not

a book nor a shred of anything upon the round centre table ; the fire-irons stood up stiff and stark against the grate ; the chairs were in a row along the wall opposite to the wide French window ; and outside of the latter were some neglected pots, containing mouldy skeletons of geraniums, blackened by the frost. Margaret stood still one moment ; then raising her hands, she cried, with a low half scream, "Mamma ! Mamma !" and ran fast from the room and upstairs into her own old nursery, where she found Sarah just beginning to uncord one of Mrs. Jackson's boxes.

Sarah had only come to live with them a few weeks before Margaret went away ; but she seemed something like a friend now ; and the little girl went close up to her, and pressed her face against her shoulder as she knelt on the ground, and said, "Sarah, I want mamma."

"Ah, poor dear !" said Sarah, busily straining away at a knot in the cord, "'tis sad for you, indeed. I wish your papa were at home ; but he is gone down to old Dame Vowler's, I'll be bound, or else over at Daniel Smith's, reading to him. He mostly don't come in till after dark, and then he has his dinner ; and Charlotte, she has got it all ready to dish up now, and he will be in before long, I dare say, and then you will soon be able to go in and see him, you know."

"Miss Hannington and I shall be glad of our tea as soon as you can get it, Sarah," said Mrs. Jackson, who had just come into the room loaded with shawls, umbrella, and basket. "You may leave that box now you have uncorded it ; for

till I have turned myself round a little, I cannot presume to say where I shall put my things, or Miss Margaret's neither. And I must say it would have looked more pleasant if the tea-things had been put ready for us, and the kettle brought up. However, I dare say if there's boiling water below, you can get it all ready whilst I take off my own things and Miss Margaret's."

Mrs. Jackson intended to end her speech graciously; but Sarah made her own comments upon it to Charlotte whilst she was setting the cups and saucers down-stairs; and they agreed very well in the conclusion, that if Mrs. Jackson thought she was come there to domineer it over them, she would "just find herself mistaken, that was all." The fact is, that Mrs. Jackson was a little irritable from her journey, and from wanting her tea; but her meaning was to be as affable as possible, and she would have been very sorry and very much surprised to think that she had said a word that could set anyone in the house against her. She came from a place where she had held the reins of government over an indolent mistress and a good-natured master, and four school-boys in the holidays; but having had a difference with one of the latter, and considering herself deeply affronted by him, she was too much hurt in her feelings to remain in the situation, so she gave warning, and came away; and Mrs. Beevor was very glad to meet with so respectable and trustworthy a person to send to her brother-in-law.

Of course Mrs. Jackson was very curious to



know what sort of gentleman the latter was, and what sort of household she had to manage; but she had not the least doubt that they would find her the treasure that she had been considered by her former master and mistress, and that whatever unpleasantness she found in them she should be able to accommodate herself to. It must be owned that she felt a considerable shock when she discovered from Sarah, and also by cross-questioning Margaret during tea, that Sarah herself, and Charlotte, the cook, formed the whole household, except a boy to clean the boots and shoes.

Oh yes! there was Will Vass—Margaret had nearly forgotten him—and though Mrs. Jackson still thought it a miserable establishment for Stonesfield House, and not at all what she expected, the addition of Will Vass was a slight consolation. Besides, of course there were plenty of people out of doors. What with the gardens and stables, a large place of that kind wanted so much keeping up. No doubt that was the reason why Mr. Hannington kept so few maids.

"Well, now, my dear, you have not told me who you have out of doors," she said, as she took up the tea-pot to pour herself out a third cup, feeling all the better for the refreshment.

Margaret looked up rather puzzled, and did not answer directly; so Mrs. Jackson added cheerfully, "The gardener, my dear, and the other men—what are their names?"

"Their names?" repeated Margaret slowly, as if she were trying to recollect; "why, there is nobody but Old Pike!"

And not all Mrs. Jackson's cross-questionings

could establish anything else than that there was an old Pike who worked in the garden, and fed the pigs, and milked the cows, and put the horse into the gig when "Papa" went out, but that Margaret thought did not often happen.

The truth is, that Mr. Hannington, although he did live at Stonesfield House, and though his fathers had been Squires of Stonesfield for two or three generations, was a very poor man; and the chief reason of this was, that he was the son of a very extravagant one. The last Mr. Hannington, having lived in his youth at a great rate, and having never saved any money to pay his debts, was obliged continually to raise it from his estate, which plan, though it kept his own head above water, was certain to sink those of his children below it. To prevent this catastrophe, he put his only son into a profession, and made him take holy orders, that he might succeed to the family living of Stonesfield, which was then held by an uncle, an old Mr. Milgate Hannington. This old Mr. Milgate Hannington died, as was quite natural, before his nephew, the squire, and his great-nephew, being then ordained, became the clergyman of the parish. He lived on, however, at the great house both before and after his father's death, whilst the parsonage was inhabited by the widow, Mrs. Milgate Hannington, and her daughter.

So now you know a great deal about Margaret's relations, both living and dead; and you know why there was only Pike out of doors, and Will Vass within, by way of men-servants; and if you had ever seen Mr. Hannington, you

would have been able to guess why, even before the death of his wife, he was such an unhappy-looking man, walking about as if he had a mill-stone round his neck, which he had no hope of ever shaking off again. I must just add, that Margaret's mother had been a sister of Dr. Beever's, and as she had very low spirits from ill-health, and was not able to stir much from home, Mr. Hannington had got into the habit of seeing little of his neighbours, and spending his days mostly in parish work, or in rambling about his fields.

Margaret could not help thinking of her father's return that afternoon with a kind of dread. When she fancied that she heard the front door open, and a step in the hall, her heart beat, and she turned round as if she half expected to see someone enter the room. But Mrs. Jackson did not observe what was in her mind ; she was very busy looking into all the eight drawers of the old double walnut-wood set that stood opposite the window, turning over their contents, and commenting on the terrible confusion in which she found them.

"To think of your nurse, Miss Hannington, having gone away and left your coloured clothes all tumbled about like this, instead of being all folded up and put by together ! However, it is of no consequence, as it happens, for I must look them all over, of course, and see what is worth keeping. And where did she keep your best frocks and sashes, my dear, for there are no ribbons at all here, and nothing but your quite commonest clothes of any kind ?"

Margaret was listening so intently to some distant sound, that she only half heard the question; and when it was repeated, the only answer that she could think of was, "I don't know."

"Don't know!" said Mrs. Jackson, descending rather heavily from the chair on which she had mounted to look into the upper drawers. "I must say it is rather singular that you should be ignorant of such a thing as that, and makes me doubt, not seeing any other chest of drawers in the room, whether they have not disappeared in some unaccountable manner. How many sashes had you, my dear?"

Margaret tried to recollect whether she ever had any; and then she said suddenly, "Oh yes; I had one once. It was a lilac one with pink flowers; but it all got twisted and tumbled, and so—"

"And so what?" said Mrs. Jackson, suspiciously, as the colour came into Margaret's face, and she stopped short.

Margaret continued silent.

"Miss Hannington," added Mrs. Jackson, advancing into the middle of the room, and speaking in rather an alarming manner, "I desire to know what has become of that sash! Your aunt, Mrs. Beevor, has ordained and appointed me to take entire charge of your clothes, and it is my duty to elucidate everything that ought to belong to you."

Margaret did not quite comprehend this speech, but it frightened her; and so, with a deeper tinge on her face, she murmured, almost inaudibly, "Mamma said I was not to wear the sash any

longer; and so she trimmed my Sunday bonnet with it."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Jackson, with some contempt in her accent. "Well," she added, after a moment's silence, observing that there were tears in Margaret's eyes, "it is of no consequence now, my dear—I shall get everything straight in time; and as I have come into the family, I shall see that things are proper in all respects, of course. And now, my dear, you must be thinking of dressing for dessert, for Sarah tells me that dinner is generally served at about six o'clock, and it is now nearly half-past."

A little while afterwards, Margaret was standing in the dark corner of the hall, close to the dining-room door, tapping gently two or three times before the answering "Come in," was given. When it was, the lock seemed to turn with difficulty in her little timid hand; and it was with slow and noiseless feet that she moved across the room towards the fire-place, where, beside a small square table, on which were wine and biscuits, sat her father, looking so much paler and graver, that Margaret for a moment thought it could not be him. He looked up as she advanced, and holding up his hand, beckoned to her to come to him; and then he set her upon his knee, and kissed her, and asked her if she was glad to come home. But there was no joy upon his own face; and the unsmiling manner, which had always caused Margaret to feel shy and silent in his presence, made it now an effort to her to answer his question.

"And who brought you home, Margaret?" asked Mr. Hannington, a vague idea coming into his mind about some letters having passed between him and Mrs. Beevor on this subject, for he was a man who had always some bewilderment in his mind, and was nearly as forgetful as that absent gentleman who boiled his watch for three minutes, and held the egg in his hand to count them. He recollected, however, as soon as Margaret mentioned Mrs. Jackson's name, and then he thought that it would be right for him to see Mrs. Jackson; so he rang the bell, and told Sarah to go up and ask her to come down. When she appeared, Margaret slipped from her father's knee, and stood beside him, little heeding what he said to Mrs. Jackson, or the latter's smooth civil speeches in reply, but brooding over the thought that was so often uppermost in her mind; and when at last Mrs. Jackson turned to go, and before the door had closed behind her, she looked up, with fear in her voice, and said, "Papa, where's mamma? I want mamma!"

It frightened her more to see the expression in her father's face as she spoke. He did not attempt to answer; and before he could have done so, Mrs. Jackson, who had overheard the question, returned into the room, and began expressing very strongly her distress at hearing Miss Hannington forget herself in that way; but Mr. Hannington waved his hand to silence the flow of her words, and only said, "Be so good as to take her away, if you please, Mrs. Jackson, and say no more. Good-night, Margaret. Go

to sleep as fast as you can. I dare say you are tired after your journey."

Whether Margaret was the better for the lecture which was given her all the time she was undressing, may be doubtful. She certainly was not the happier. Her sad little heart seemed pressed down with a sorrow that no one could see or pity. Oh, if Alfred were but at home! He would sometimes let her talk to him when he had nothing particular to do; but now there was nobody, and papa was angry with her too! Then, when her head was laid on the pillow, came the recollection of the nightly visit to her bed-side—the last words and the loving kisses which she had so bitterly missed, and now must never hope for. And stretching out her hands, poor Margaret uttered again that low cry which spoke the utmost suffering of a child's spirit, and burst into a flood of tears. Now she knew and understood that her mother was taken away from the earth, and that she should never see her again; and Mrs. Jackson's reproof had extinguished for ever the last little spark of hope that had lingered so long in her childish heart. The latter had left the room, so there was no one to blame, or to endeavour to pacify, her sorrow. She lay there with her sobbing heart and her tearful eyes, whilst the fire, which had been burning brightly, grew dim and dead, and the shadows on the walls and ceiling more deep and dark. The sudden falling of a large coal startled her; and her sobs were stayed as she lifted her feverish head from the pillow, and felt the silence and loneliness around her.

But Mrs. Jackson returned at that moment, and Margaret was comforted by her presence, and by the candle, although she immediately received a reproof for not having been asleep half an hour before. She was so still and quiet, that Mrs. Jackson had no doubt that she had fallen asleep at last ; but though Margaret's eyes were closed, she was only at times in a kind of dreamy doze, which was much less sound and deep than real slumber.

It was hours long before the sleep came ; and when it did it was short, for suddenly the door of the room was violently burst open, and Margaret jumped up with a start of terror, unable to recollect where she was, or what was happening. Her little bed was on the other side of the room from the door, and as she looked towards the latter, a strange light upon the adjoining wall caught her fear-struck eyes. The fire was quite gone out, and all was total darkness except on this spot ; and there, as Margaret gazed, with a heart almost ceasing to beat from her agony of fear, and the dreadful expectation of entering footsteps, she saw, or fancied, that dark and strange shadows were moving across it. She could not scream : her throat was dry, and her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. She dared not move, for to reach Mrs. Jackson's bed she must pass some way across the room, which was a large one, and approach nearer to the open door. The terrors of night had seized upon her spirit, and no help or protection was at hand. In another moment the counterpane of her bed seemed grasped by a shadowy hand ;



there was a sound of breathing in her ears, and as her eyes closed in agony, there came to her lips the first words of the Lord's Prayer—"Our Father which art in Heaven;" and she repeated it to the end, hardly knowing what she did. Then there was deep stillness; the violent throbings of her heart grew somewhat calmer; she heard the wind sweeping round the house and against the windows, for it was a gusty night, but that natural sound seemed to comfort her; and when she ventured to re-open her eyes, she saw indeed the same light upon the wall, but no shadows seemed flickering over it; and it came into her mind that it was caused by the moonlight from the passage window shining through the open door. But how came the door to be burst open? The poor little heart throbbed again at the recollection of that startling sound; and still more when it was partly repeated by the door swaying back again upon its hinges, and shaking the lock, though not hard enough to fasten it. Yet, after the first moment, that new terror brought comfort too, for Margaret felt that it was the wind which moved the door then, and so it might have been the same cause which burst it open before. Gradually her awful fear passed away from her; she dared to move one arm, which was bent and stiffened beneath her; her eyes were suffered quietly to close, and after a while deep and tranquil sleep once more fell over her.

It was the sorrow and loneliness which were lying at the bottom of her heart that caused that agony of midnight fear; but He with Whom is

no darkness at all, but the night is as clear as the day—He through Whose Power alone we can lie down and sleep in safety—was watching over the suffering child, and guarding her from evil, even when the shadows seemed thickest around her, and the help that was needed He was not slow to grant.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### MARGARET'S EDUCATION.

MARGARET awoke in the morning, refreshed, and more disposed to be cheerful and at ease. She remembered, indeed, the "weary hours of gloom" when she had been so "sore afraid;" but now it seemed strange to her that the swinging of the door should have frightened her so much, and the shadows on the wall must, she knew, have been only fancy. She had half a mind to tell Mrs. Jackson about it, and it would have been better if she had done so; but her second thought was to keep it all to herself, and being buried in her mind, the recollection rose up again afterwards when she chanced to lie awake at night, more than it would have done if she had talked of it openly to another person. Perhaps she should tell Alfred when he came home. If he were but here, she would tell him now,

she thought ; but then he might laugh at her, as he did one day when she told him a dream she had of something that happened to her in a street in London, how she fancied that a stooping old man was hobbling after her, and how he put out his hand to seize her, and just as he touched her shoulder she shut her eyes, and said a little prayer to herself, and when she looked round, he was gone. Margaret's heart beat a little when she recollected the terror of that dream, and how ashamed she had felt when Alfred called her a great baby for fancying such things, and threatened to tell her cousins. No, Alfred should not hear of this, and when he came home, she should soon forget all about it herself. His coming home was the hope on which her heart was set. The days seemed long and dull till then, and she hardly knew what to do with herself at all times. If she could have gone out-of-doors every day, it would have been better. She was happy out-of-doors, especially when Mrs. Jackson let her go into the garden by herself, and talk to old Pike ; or when she could slip into the yard, and have a game of play with Marmion, who was always glad to see her, and of such an easy disposition, that he had no objection to her seating herself now and then upon his back, or trying to lift him up by his fore paws. But Marmion was not upon terms with Mrs. Jackson, who, as he was quite aware, had taken a dislike to him from the first, and in return for this, and her incivility in keeping as far off as possible whenever she had to pass through the yard, he made a point of jumping

to the end of his chain, and barking at her with the greatest fury of manner. More and more seldom, however, did he get an opportunity of expressing his feelings. Mrs. Jackson had been told that it was part of her duty to take Margaret out walking every day; but she liked sitting over the fire much better than trudging about in the December mud, so some days the weather was so bad, and some days she was so busy, that she thought it right to stay in-doors; and unfortunately, she very often thought it right to make Margaret stay in too, for she soon found that Mr. Hannington never interfered or inquired about the matter.

"How one is to set one's foot out-of-doors with any comfort in such a place as this," she observed, "no mortal Christian can say. If it were not for always being willing to accommodate myself, and not to regard anything in comparison with my duties, what with the damp grass in the garden, and the dreadful mud of the village, and that dismal yard, where you never see anything but a ramping dog ready to tear you to rags, I must sink under it. And I am sure I don't wonder at your being so dull as you were at first, Margaret, my dear, though I think you seem happier now, which is not surprising, considering all I am doing for you."

Margaret did not feel at all clear what it was that Mrs. Jackson was doing to make her happier; but after reflecting for a moment, she supposed that she must mean to refer to the hour which was spent every morning over her lessons. Margaret was rather fond of learning,

and not at all careless or stupid, but she was very backward for her age, for her poor mamma had not been able to do much more than teach her to read, and Mrs. Beevor thought that Mrs. Jackson would be quite equal to attending to her lessons for another year or two, as masters could be had from Churchbury when Mr. Hannington chose that she should begin French and music. So Mrs. Jackson established herself every morning close to the fire, with her feet upon the fender, in the most comfortable chair she could find, after she had spent some time in covering the table beside her with odds and ends of glazed cambric, various selections of wires, buttons, whale-bones, and a heap of garments of her own or Margaret's, which required to be altered into a more fashionable shape ; and then, with her thimble on her finger, and a good needleful of thread, she was quite ready to attend to Margaret. It was but a small stock of lesson-books that the latter possessed, and she had a good hunt over the house before she could collect even these together, for her spelling-book had most presumptuously stuck itself into a shelf in the drawing-room book-case, between "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake," and the poor little geography-book, on the contrary, was lying face downwards under a box of old wooden lions and tigers in the nursery cupboard. Besides these two, there was only a hymn-book, and a little shabby brown book of poetry, which was a great favourite with Margaret, for it had belonged to her mamma when she was a child, and had her name on the cover, and she had

loved so much to hear her mamma read to her some of the pretty verses and stories in it, such as,

"A raven, while, with glossy breast,  
Her new-laid eggs she fondly pressed ;"

or that upon Day, beginning,

"In the barn the tenant cock,  
Close to Partlett perched on high,  
Briskly crows—the shepherd's clock—  
Jocund that the morning's nigh ;"

or the Mouse's Petition—

"O hear a pensive prisoner's prayer,  
For liberty that sighs,  
And never let thine heart be shut  
Against the wretch's cries."

"What in the world have you brought that rubbishy thing for, Miss Margaret?" Mrs. Jackson asked as she took up the poor little poetry-book by its half-broken lid. "I don't see that there is anything in it but silly verses that nobody would think of being so giddy as to look at."

"O Mrs. Jackson!" exclaimed Margaret, "it is such a beautiful book. You don't know how fond I am of it."

"Beautiful!" returned Mrs. Jackson, contemptuously; "it is fit for nothing but to put behind the fire; and I cannot think, Miss Hannington, how you can presume to be fond of anything so mean, and likewise, at the same time, so trifling."

Margaret said not a word more; but that afternoon the dear little old verse-book was placed at

the bottom of a small red trunk, in which the doll's clothes were supposed to be kept, but where lay hidden two or three other treasures which Margaret only took out and looked at when she was quite alone; namely, a pincushion in the shape of a golden harp, with a long piece of blue china-ribbon to hang it round the neck; a walnut-shell, which opened, and contained inside a very small crimson satin needle-book, and an ivory thimble; a very old grey fur rabbit, which Margaret had been passionately fond of when she was a very little girl; and a picture of a tortoise-shell cat's head, with bright green eyes; all which, as they had been given her at different times by her dear mamma, Margaret looked upon as keepsakes, and would not have parted with for the world.

"Well, and are you learning to read? Does Mrs. Jackson teach you anything?" said Mr. Hannington, one evening when Margaret had been at home rather more than a week, and he heard her telling her doll, whom she usually carried down to dessert, that she was ashamed of her for not knowing her letters.

Margaret looked up, quite surprised that her papa seemed to know so little what she could do, or was doing. "Papa, I say spelling and geography every morning to Mrs. Jackson, and sometimes my multiplication-table too, when she is not very busy; and I read a little bit of Rosamond, and like it very much."

"Oh, I am very glad that Mrs. Jackson teaches you," said Mr. Hannington. "Your Cousin Maria was asking me about it this morn-

ing, and I did not recollect at the moment whether you did any lessons or not."

"But, Papa," said Margaret very earnestly, feeling encouraged by her papa's talking to her so much, for very often he did not say a word, but was busy reading or thinking, and left her to amuse herself as she liked with her doll. "But, Papa, I do so want to go on with my writing; and Mrs. Jackson says that I need not learn any hymns, and I did know five of the prettiest all through very well."

"Well, my dear, if you know so many, you need not learn any more at present," said Mr. Hannington, not much attending to the meaning of what she had said.

Margaret looked disappointed, but after considering for a minute or two, she only added, without any more mention of the hymns, "But, Papa, if I could but learn to write!"

"Learn to write," repeated Mr. Hannington, in an absent manner. "And Mrs. Jackson thinks you are not old enough; is that it? Well, Margaret, I hope, when you do learn, you will write better than your brother Alfred, for his letter this morning was so full of crooked strokes, that I don't think he can have been taking any pains at all."

"Did he say that he was coming home, Papa?" said Margaret, fixing her eager eyes upon her father. "Will it be soon?"

"On Thursday week," said Mr. Hannington. "Let me see, I must recollect to send the gig for him; or perhaps I may be able to fetch him myself."



"What a long, long time off!" thought Margaret; and all considerations about her writing were forgotten for a minute or two in trying to reckon exactly how many days must pass before this happy one of Alfred's return arrived. Then it seemed rather difficult to bring up the writing again; however, she took courage, and was just going to begin a sentence with, "Papa, I can write now a little," when Mr. Hannington said, rather suddenly, as if a recollection had just come into his head, "Oh, by-the-way, Margaret, how is it that you have never been to see your Aunt Milgate and your Cousin Maria ever since you have been at home? Your cousin says that she has hardly once had a glimpse of you."

"Papa, I have seen her at church," answered Margaret; "and one Sunday, when Aunt Milgate was there too, she spoke to me."

"But they want you to come to the Rectory," said Mr. Hannington, "and you ought to go."

"Go by myself?" asked Margaret, looking up with some terror.

"Go by yourself, if there is no one to go with you," answered her father. "What is there to hurt you in that short distance?"

"Nothing, Papa," answered Margaret; "and I used sometimes to run over by myself when I was sent with a message or anything; but then I never went into the house."

"Well, remember that I wish you to go there always once or twice a week," said Mr. Hannington; "and now it is bed-time, so good-night, my dear." And Margaret went up, to dream of standing alone at the front door of the Rectory,

trying to pull the jingling old bell, and being shown at last into the little hot parlour, where sat all the year round her old Aunt Milgate, in a black bombazin gown, a black shawl, and a wide green shade over her eyes. Often enough had Margaret been in that parlour. It had been her mother's practice, at least thrée times a week, to go over to the Rectory with her work-bag on her arm, and sit there knitting grey worsted stockings for the poor old people of Stonesfield the greater part of the afternoon. It was not a lively way of spending her time, for old Mrs. Milgate Hannington was very deaf, and a little childish, and so it was not easy to entertain her; but Margaret's mother was patient and humble, and performed this duty month after month and year after year of her quiet life, without a thought of herself, or any idea of pity or praise for doing it; and sometimes, but not as often as the old lady wished it, she took Margaret with her. Mrs. Milgate used to try to raise her stooping head when her niece came in, and peer from under her green shade to see whether Margaret was there; and if she saw her, her dim eyes would brighten a little, and she would say, "Come hither, my dear. How do you do to-day? I am glad your good mamma has brought you to see me. And how is your papa, eh, my dear? I don't hear what you say. Children should learn always to speak distinctly, should not they, Mrs. Richard? Well; and now you can go and sit on the window-seat, and look at the pretty picture-book, while your mamma and I are talking together." And in the win-

dow-seat Margaret had to stay, looking at the same books of prints—one volume of Views in Rome, and another of Gentlemen's Seats in Hampshire; or watching the flies foolishly buzzing up and down the window-pane, and wishing with all her heart that she could change places with every or any living thing that she saw out-of-doors, from the swallow darting over the chimney-top, to the poor stupid snail creeping along the garden path. But where was Cousin Maria, the Cousin Maria whom Mr. Hannington spoke of? Why, Cousin Maria was not, to tell the truth, very fond of Stonesfield Rectory, or Stonesfield village, or Stonesfield House either, for that matter. She could not go and stay from home much, because her mother was too infirm to move or be left alone; but she had several friends in the neighbourhood, and particularly a family living at Down Park, about two miles off, with whom she used to spend a great deal of her time. If you want to know what Cousin Maria was like, I will just tell you that she was tall and dark, with a large nose, not very young, and always very handsomely dressed; and I think it might be partly because there was almost always a grand kind of rustle about her, and more perhaps because Cousin Maria was not naturally fond of children, that little Margaret had never learnt to be very fond of her. She would have been very glad if Mrs. Jackson would have gone with her to the Rectory the next day, but nothing was really less likely. Mrs. Jackson had always been subject to dislikes. She disliked Marmion, as we know;

and from the very first Sunday that she saw Miss Hannington, she disliked her quite as much. I cannot pretend to tell the reason why. All I know is, that when at last Margaret said, in her timid voice, "Mrs. Jackson, could not you take me to the Rectory to-day?" Mrs. Jackson looked up quite sharply, and answered, "Me, my dear! No, indeed! I see no reason for me to presume to do any such thing. Your cousin, Miss Maria Hannington, has never made acknowledgment in any way of my being here, and I am sure it would give me quite a turn to see that young woman, who I understand is the parlour-maid, come to the door. As I said to myself afterwards, those red velvet bows outside her bonnet last Sunday, made her quite the figure of the church. And as for your wishing me to go with you, Miss Margaret—in my opinion you are too fond, by far, of running wild all about the place by yourself; therefore why you should mind going to the Rectory is beyond me to understand, and I think it is quite proper what your papa has said, that you and your brother should go over and see the poor old lady very frequently; therefore I shall make it my business to see that you do it."

## CHAPTER V.

## ALFRED'S HOLIDAYS.

"AND when is your brother coming home, did you say, my dear?" asked old Mrs. Milgate for the third time, when Margaret found herself that afternoon standing in the little hot parlour close to her aunt, with one of her hands tightly grasped in the wrinkled fingers of the latter.

"Ah, that will be a pleasure to you indeed! You used to be always about together, I recollect. I am glad he is coming back," said the kind old lady. "And so he has been at school for some time past. And when did you say that the holidays begin, my dear?"

Margaret repeated once more the day that Alfred was expected. "Ah, Thursday will soon be here," continued her aunt; "though I dare say it seems long to you, my dear. You want a little companion, no doubt. Ah, you miss your dear good mamma; and so do I too, my child, very much indeed. Every day I seem so to long to see her come in, and sit with me again; but that is wrong and foolish, you know, Margaret, my love, because God is very good, and He has taken her away to make her very happy, and so we ought not to wish her to be here again; and we ought to be glad, and not sorry, though we do miss her so much. Should not we, Margaret, my dear?"

Margaret's heart swelled for a moment, as if a sob were coming, and then she looked up and caught the simple, humble look in the old lady's eyes, and she answered in a low and quiet voice, "Yes, Ma'am."

"Well, I dare say you will like to run away out-of-doors now, so I will not keep you any longer," said the old lady; "and you must bring Alfred to see me when he comes to-morrow, and I hope you will be very happy together, my dear; and perhaps your cousin Maria may think of asking you to come and drink tea with us some day, but she is out now somewhere, so I cannot say; and so good-by, my dear, to-day, and thank you for coming to pay me this little visit."

And Margaret went away; but as she caught the last glimpse of her aunt, before she closed the parlour-door, sitting alone there, so patient and gentle, with her bowed head, and meek quiet eyes, she would almost have liked to have returned and stayed with her much longer. Those simple, but true words of pity and kindness, had touched her sorrowful heart; and though she could not have told why, those few minutes spent with her poor infirm old aunt, had done more to brighten and comfort her, than anything that had happened since she came back to Stonesfield. It seemed pleasant now to think of going to the Rectory again; and before the Thursday on which Alfred was to come, Margaret had paid old Mrs. Hannington two more visits, one with her papa, and one by herself, and the last time had wound a skein of red lamb's-wool, and put her aunt's knitting-basket

to rights ; so it was no wonder that she felt herself of some importance, and believed, as was quite true, that the latter was really very glad of her company.

"And you will bring Alfred with you to see me the next time you come, my dear," said the old lady, when Margaret took leave of her on Wednesday. "I shall not expect to see you tomorrow ; but the next day, if we all live so long, and if your papa has no objection, I hope you will both come and pay me a little visit."

"Oh, I don't think papa will want us, so we shall be sure to come," said Margaret ; for in truth, although she had gone with him one day by chance to the Rectory, Margaret saw so little of her papa from morning to evening, that it seemed impossible for him to know anything of what they did in the afternoon, either out of doors or in.

However, an obstacle did arise to this little promised visit to old Mrs. Milgate Hannington, where Margaret had still less expected it—Alfred positively refused to go. He came home late on Thursday evening, between six and seven o'clock, after Margaret had been longing and listening for the sound of the wheels for more than an hour ; but when he came into the hall, there was such a cold dull look in his face, that instead of throwing her arms round his neck, and crying, "Oh, Alfred dear, I am so glad you are come !" as she thought she should, Margaret only gave him a very quiet kiss, and then shrank out of the way of her papa and the black trunk coming into the hall together. It was only another of

the continual instances in which disappointment comes hand in hand with the fulfilment of our warmest wishes.

Margaret thought that when Alfred came home she must be very happy; and now it seemed as if he did not care for her, or Stonesfield, or anything at all. He made only a half kind of answer when his papa asked him whether he liked being at school, and Margaret tried in vain to make him own that he was glad that the holidays were come. A more stupid, heavy, dull-hearted boy, than he appeared the first evening, could not be imagined anywhere. But this state of indifference, whether it was real or pretended, soon came to an end. In the course of the next morning Master Alfred changed into quite a different creature. It must have been chiefly the society of Will Vass, or else of Gypsey, the old donkey who drew the well rope, which had such a favourable influence upon his spirits, for he disappeared immediately after breakfast; and when Margaret went out about twelve o'clock with Mrs. Jackson's leave, to see if she could find him, after a long search all over the premises, he was discovered galloping old Gypsey round and round a small paddock at the back of the house, while Will Vass was running close behind, administering continual pokes and kicks.

"Halloo, Madge, would you like a ride?" shouted her brother when he saw her. "I have been exercising the old thing here for the last hour, and she is not near as stiff as she was at first. Will and I are going to put a leaping bar



out here, and then we shall have rare fun. Come along, Will, and let us see about it now. Won't it be jolly? You shall have a ride by-and-by, in the afternoon, Madge, and you can come and see us put up the bar now."

"Yes, but I don't want to ride the donkey in the afternoon, Alfred," said Margaret quietly, going up to her brother as he jumped from Gypsy's back; "I am going to pay Aunt Milgate a visit, and she wants you to come too; so I hope you will."

"Hang Aunt Milgate!" exclaimed Alfred, irreverently; "what should I go to see her for? I remember, when I went once, a long time ago, she asked me, five times running, whether I was not very fond of reading; and Cousin Maria talked the most horrid rubbish about being ashamed of me, because I said that there was no good in learning to read at all, and that I had much rather be a dunce than not."

"O Alfred!" said Margaret, "how could you say so? I am sure I hope, with all my heart, that you never will be a dunce; and I know it would really make you very unhappy."

"Would it!" said Alfred scornfully; "you are a goose, Margaret, and know nothing at all about the matter. Why, old Ball, our schoolmaster, told me that I was the greatest dunce he ever came across in his life; and I only laughed, and so did a good many of the boys, and we had jolly fun about it afterwards. And I can just tell you, that there is no more chance of my ever learning Latin and Greek, than there is of my going with you to see that stupid old aunt this after-

noon; so you can make yourself quite easy on that point."

Margaret tried to laugh; she hardly knew whether Alfred were speaking quite in joke or not; and something seemed to pass through her heart as she listened, that made the laugh a very sad one. She knew very well that Alfred had never been quick at his book. Many a little quiet sigh had she spent upon the subject, when it had come too clearly to her knowledge that he had never learnt the lessons which were to be got by heart, or when she half guessed the deep vexation which saddened her mother's face, as Mr. Hannington sometimes burst out into an impatient exclamation over the hopelessness of ever teaching Alfred anything. But Margaret was but a little girl; and though she was very quick in feeling for her age, she could not, happily, see half the bad consequences of Alfred's perverse idleness—either past, present, or future. She said nothing more on the unpleasant subject of the Latin and Greek, or of the visit to Aunt Milgate; and very soon she was much too busy in helping Alfred and Will Vass to make the leaping bar, to remember either one or the other. The old cracked dinner-bell, which told Margaret that it was time to go in, rang before their work was finished; but she begged Alfred in vain to leave off, and come in directly. It was not *his* dinner—he was to dine at six o'clock with his papa; but Mrs. Jackson had settled that it would be best for Margaret to have her dinner as usual with her up-stairs, and then Master Alfred could have some luncheon at the same time. Margaret

had finished her slice of roast mutton, and Sarah had brought up a dish with three ample apple-dumplings sitting on it side by side, before Alfred came in ; but Mrs. Jackson's consideration in bespeaking a third dumpling for him, was rewarded by his joyful exclamations at the sight of it, and also by the satisfaction with which he immediately fell upon and devoured it.

"If they gave us such grub as that at school," said he, when it was finished, "I don't know but what I might go back there ; but when we do have apple-dumplings, they are such jaw-stickers, that a fellow can hardly swallow them. And the suet-puddings are still worse ; however, I can just tell old Ball that I am not going to have any more of it, whatever he may think of the matter."

"O Alfred !" said Margaret, with wondering eyes. "Has papa said that you were not to go to school again, or are you going anywhere else instead ?"

"Papa knows nothing about it," said Alfred ; "but all the same I am not going to school again, Madge, there or anywhere else, and so you will see."

"Well," said Mrs. Jackson, putting in her word, "of course it is naturally very enraging to you, Master Alfred, to be so neglected in your victuals, and if I can be of any service in bringing it before your papa, you may depend upon my doing so to the best of my poor abilities. But still I should say, Master Alfred, though it seems distressing to have to swallow such things, that it would be better for you and Miss Mar-

garet to look forward distinctly to your returning to school, in case your papa should not feel the same with regard to the puddings that you do."

These very sensible remarks seemed, however, entirely thrown away, for Alfred only protested the more vehemently that nothing should ever induce him to go back to school; and Margaret, between surprise at his determination, and a feeling of joy at the thought of his staying at home, could not look forward "distinctly" to anything. Very soon, indeed, she forgot to think at all of the subject; the days passed away very happily one after another; and though she was a great deal with Alfred out of doors and in, he said not a word more about it, and it seemed as if his school life had entirely escaped from his recollection. Old Gypsey attained to wonderful perfection in her leaping, considering her years; and many an hour Margaret spent standing out in the wet spongy meadow, admiring her performance as Alfred galloped her round and round, and took her over the bar in excellent style, or sometimes persuaded her to mount and take a timid trot up and down herself, though only after she had made Alfred solemnly promise on no account to allow Gypsey to jump or gallop. It would have been kinder to Gypsey if old Pike had forbidden her being taken out in this manner every day; but the truth is, it had always been the way to let Master Alfred do just as he liked about the premises, and from the tender age at which he first began to hunt the pigs round the farm-yard, all the animals had suffered from his attentions; so old Pike gave Gypsey quite over

to his mercy, and only turned Will Vass out of the meadow when he found him there, or called out, "Take care of yourself, Missy," to Margaret, if he saw her uneasily mounted on the donkey's unsaddled back. He would have had more reason to cry out to Margaret to take care of herself, if he had known all the enterprises into which Alfred led her. The home farm at Stonesfield was close to the mansion; and though it was let, and the farm-house occupied, the barns and out-buildings had always been very pleasant hunting grounds to Alfred, in spite of his having been turned out neck and heels more than once by Farmer Merry or his men, for his mischievous proceedings there. Now a little way down a flint path, which led from the court-yard of Stonesfield House, there was a creaky old door, which looked as if it was quite ready to fall off its hinges, but had quite given up all thoughts of opening in a respectable manner. Margaret had often looked at it with a kind of awe in her solitary wanderings about the premises; but as to ever passing through it, such an idea would never have entered her head. But one day when Alfred asked her if she would come along and have a game of play in the barn, to her astonishment he took her to this very old door, opened it with the greatest ease, and lo and behold! they were in nothing more or less than an old stable, so dark, that Margaret could scarcely at first tell whether it was quite empty or not.

"But this is not the barn, Alfred," she said, as soon as she could see where she was.

"No, of course it is not," he answered; "but

you just come with me, and we shall soon be there. The barn-doors are shut, and old Merry would not let us get in if they were open; but it is capital fun going this way, if you don't mind the pigs; so come along after me as fast as you can."

As he spoke he began climbing upon the manger, and thence, by means of a narrow projecting beam, to the top of the wall; and Margaret, following him as well as she could, although with a beating heart, found herself presently on her hands and knees, clambering along some rough poles half a yard apart, immediately over the pig-sties, and having much too close and clear a view of an old sow with a great many little pigs grumping about in the straw just under her. Oh, the dangers of that journey! Even Alfred was obliged to crawl along very carefully; and if Margaret had not been afraid of being left behind, she never would have got across at all. However, with all her might, she tried not to think about the old sow, and she was just reaching the end of the poles in safety, when some impertinence in one of the little pigs caused the sow to start up suddenly with such a furious grunt, that Margaret almost jumped out of her skin, and her left foot slipped so far between the poles, that if she had not seized hold of Alfred's jacket, she might have fallen through in another second. Oh, what terrible dreams she had that night of that cruel and relentless sow biting off her left foot, and twinkling her cruel eyes as she munched and crunched it, boot and all, between her teeth!

“Now for a good jump ! Follow me, Madge, and don’t be frightened,” said Alfred ; and scrambling up to a square opening, or doorway, in the boarded wall, he suddenly disappeared on the other side, and Margaret found, to her dismay, that she had no choice but to take what seemed to her a fearful jump down from this doorway to a bed of straw at the bottom of the barn. She made the venture, and was not hurt at all ; and when she shook herself and looked round, it was pleasant to see by the narrow streams of light through the chinks of the closed doors on each side, that they really were all by themselves in the barn. And a grand game of play they had there, jumping, racing, hiding, and tumbling about in the straw, till Margaret was quite tired, and began to recollect that it must be dinner-time. Nevertheless, when Alfred, pulling out the pitchfork which fastened the great doors inside, threw them wide open, and said she might go home whenever she liked, she would have liked to have stayed a little longer.

In spite of the terrible dream about the old sow, and in spite of much wonder and suspicion in the farm-yard, as to “whoever set them there barn-doors open,” that rash expedition over the pig-sties was repeated the very next day—yes, and very often afterwards ; and there sat Mrs. Jackson with her work-basket and her footstool, by the blazing fire in-doors, never thinking or suspecting what “Miss Hannington” was doing, but very thankful that, having her brother for a companion, there could be “no kind of occasion for her to be going paddling about in such damp

sloppy weather, which would be sure to bring on her tooth-ache, and when she had so much work to do too."

But all this time, where were Margaret's visits to old Mrs. Milgate? Not once had she been to see her since Alfred came home, though she had thought of doing it often enough. Very wrong and unkind, perhaps you may think; but it seems to me that we cannot be hard upon her, because older people so often allow themselves to be turned away from little things which they feel to be right and kind, without caring at all for the disappointment or loss to others. Nobody reminded Margaret that she ought to go and see her aunt, and Alfred persisted in it that he would not, and every day there was something to be done which interfered with the visit. Besides, what was she to say if her aunt asked why Alfred did not come?

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## CHAPTER VI.

### ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES.

IN spite of the ignominy of riding a donkey, Alfred, having a thirst for novelty, determined one day to put his dignity in his pocket, and take a gallop on Gypsey through the village. Margaret accompanied him through the gate, and a little way down the lane; and as she stood



watching his very zigzag progress, as the donkey galloped first on one side and then on the other, her Cousin Maria appeared, coming home from some walk or visit.

"Are you going after Alfred all through the village by yourself? Where is Mrs. Jackson?" she asked, as she came up to Margaret.

"Mrs. Jackson is indoors," Margaret answered. "And I was not going after Alfred any farther, Cousin Maria. I dare say he will come back presently."

"I dare say no such thing!" said Miss Hannington. "You had better come in and see your aunt, Margaret. She said yesterday that you had not come to see her since—I don't know when."

Margaret coloured, and without any answer followed her cousin to the Rectory door, and was soon in the little parlour, the latter calling out in a loud voice as she went in, "Here, Ma'am, I've caught Miss Margaret wandering about in the village by herself, and I hope you will tell her that she is a very wild ill-mannered little girl."

The old lady did not appear to heed these words, and her daughter left the room when they were spoken; but taking both of Margaret's hands in her usual fashion, and lifting her bowed head towards her, she said, "Well, my dear, and how do you do to-day? I am so glad to think that you have been happy playing with your brother. And don't you think, Margaret, my child, of coming to see me in the holidays, if your brother would rather not. It is dull for

him, you know, my dear; and when he goes back, you will have plenty of time to pay me a visit now and then, if I am still alive; so you must promise me to do what he likes best now, because, as I understand your papa to say, his holidays are but short altogether."

"Oh no, Aunt Milgate," said Margaret very earnestly; "Alfred says that he is not going back to school at all."

"Going back where, did you say, my dear?" asked her aunt, too deaf to hear readily Margaret's childish voice. Margaret repeated the words, but when they were caught, the old lady did not seem at first to take in their meaning. "Not going back to school at all?" she repeated slowly—"Not going back to school? But then, my dear, when is he going?"

"I don't know, Ma'am," Margaret answered doubtfully, "but he says that he is not going back now."

"But I don't seem to see how it is, either," said the old lady, with rather a puzzled look in her mild face. "My memory is gone, I know; but I thought your papa was here not long ago—it might have been yesterday, but I cannot tell—and I seem to recollect his saying that your brother's holidays were almost over. Because I thought, you know, my dear, that then you would be coming to see me again very soon; but I dare say I did not hear rightly. My daughter tells me that I seldom do; and most likely my poor head is quite in a blunder about the matter altogether."

"About what matter, Mother?" said Miss

Hannington, returning at that moment, and speaking in her unsoftened voice. "What is your poor head in trouble about now?"

"Not in trouble at all, my dear, thank you," said the old lady gently; "only I was thinking that Richard had told us that the holidays were nearly over, and Margaret says that her brother is not going back to school, and I am very glad to hear it, very glad indeed, because it will be so pleasant for her, you know, poor child; very pleasant and comfortable indeed."

"Gracious me, Margaret!" exclaimed her cousin, "what nonsense have you been talking to your aunt? As if you did not know that Alfred is going away again next week! I forget what day your papa said, but the sooner the better, I am sure, for he is as idle and mischievous as ever he can be at home; and how Mrs. Jackson can let you scramble about with him as she does, is past my comprehension."

Poor little Margaret's spirit was roused by this rough way of speaking of her brother. The tears came into her eyes, but she conquered them, and with a burning cheek, she said, "Papa never said that Alfred was idle and mischievous, and I know he won't make him go to school if he is very unhappy there;" and then, frightened at having spoken so to Cousin Maria, and grieved by the sharp words of the latter, her voice was drowned in sobs.

The old lady was quite distressed at the sight. "My dear child," she said, taking Margaret's hand, and stroking it softly, "I don't like you to cry, I don't indeed. And your Cousin Maria

will be quite sorry, I am sure. And never mind about the holidays, my love. Your papa will do what is best, you know; and, my child, we must try to take things patiently, because we cannot have what we like in this world; we cannot indeed, Margaret, my dear."

"Margaret has not much to trouble her, at any rate, Ma'am," said Miss Hannington, rather indignantly. "What Mrs. Jackson may do indoors I cannot say, but I am sure she leaves her very much to her own devices out; and I must say, Miss Margaret," she added in a lower voice, "if she had taught you to be more respectful to your elders and betters, it would be as well. If you don't choose to come and see your aunt except when you cannot help it, you might behave properly when you *are* here."

Poor little Margaret! The reproach for staying away cut deeply, because she thought it was deserved. It is not all people who can see into children's hearts, and understand their characters and their trials. Miss Hannington had never taken much notice of her little cousin. She thought that children were in general brought a great deal too forward; and as Margaret had been constantly her mother's companion, she set it down as a certainty that she was spoilt. And if the child had had naturally a very proud or self-willed temper, perhaps she might have been; for Mrs. Hannington, though a very affectionate, was a very indulgent mamma, and had a kind of passive indolence about her which would have made it next to impossible to her to punish firmly, if much punishment had been required.

But Margaret was of a gentle spirit, easily touched, and very fond of her mother, and she was obedient because she liked to please the latter more than because she had been taught much about the duty of being so. Never in her life had she been spoken roughly to. Her father had never played with his children, or taken much notice of them in any way; but nothing would have seemed stranger to Margaret than to be found fault with by him, for all that he ever did was to take her upon his knee, kiss her gravely, and ask her about her dolls or her playthings.

Miss Hannington could not see the pain of spirit at having been naughty enough to be so reproved, which made Margaret's sobs and tears redouble. She had been very happy and merry playing with her brother every day, and no one would have known her for the little, pale, sad Margaret who came back to Stonesfield a few weeks before. And the hope that Alfred would stay had grown stronger silently in her heart. And now came the reverse; and her sorrow was altogether quite beyond her cousin's comprehension. She was quick, however, in taking the most effectual way to stop it. "Margaret," she said, "I cannot allow you to worry your aunt by crying in that way. You must either stop, or go home directly."

And Margaret, in the midst of her sobs, looked in her aunt's face, and saw those kind eyes dimmed with unshed tears, and she kept back her own, and checked her sobs, and tried to say, though it was but in a broken voice, "Aunt, I am very very sorry."

"No, my dear; no, no," said the old lady, laying her wrinkled hand upon the child's head. "There is no need to mind. It is all right again now. I know it was my poor head that made me say something I had better not; but you must forget all about it. And give my kind love to your brother, my dear, and to your good papa; and now you shall run home, for the air will do you good; and so good-by, my love, for to-day, and God bless you, whatever comes to pass."

"Ah," said Miss Hannington, when Margaret had shut the door behind her, "that comes of spoiling children! Much good that fine Mrs. Jackson, whom Mrs. Beever chose to send down here, seems to have done! I am sure there is no improvement in Margaret; and as to Alfred, by all accounts, he is more rude and mischievous than ever." And she proceeded to tell her mother some wonderful stories which she had heard of Alfred's performances in the farm-yard since he had been at home, in which the setting the barn doors wide open was not forgotten, though the manner of doing the latter trick was a mystery to her.

In the meantime little sorrowful Margaret was pondering over all that had passed, and making up her mind that whether Alfred liked it or not, she must talk to him about his going back to school that very day, as soon as he came in. Sarah, however, had brought up the nursery tea, and Mrs. Jackson had lighted the candle, and was busy over her toast, before Alfred made his very dirty appearance, splashed with mud up to

his shoulder, and brandishing a great stick, the sight of which was enough to make even a donkey shiver in his skin.

"Now, Mrs. Jackson," he cried, "hand up the toast, will you, as fast as you can, for if you don't I shall swallow the loaf whole. I am so hungry that I cannot wait for dinner. And some tea too, and plenty of sugar; and look sharp, pray."

"Yes, Sir, certainly," said Mrs. Jackson, looking up from the fire with a very burnt countenance. "I shall not lose any time, Sir, you may be positive; but really, Master Alfred, with that nasty mud all over you, and those boots, I must request you distinctly to go and get ready for dinner at once, and by that time your tea will be poured out. But as it is, I could not presume to answer it to myself, to allow you to sit down with Miss Hannington."

"Dear me, what a fine lady Miss Hannington is growing, is not she?" said Alfred tauntingly, but going out of the room as he spoke to attend to Mrs. Jackson's wishes, for as the latter never attempted to exercise much control over him, and was extremely soft and civil in her manners, they were on very fair terms together; and Mrs. Jackson, although she by no means desired more of his company up-stairs, thought it desirable to make a friend of him when he was there.

The quantity of toast and tea that was consumed by Master Alfred when he came back, must have very much injured his appetite for his dinner afterwards; but to make it even, Margaret, who had no dinner to come, hardly

ate anything at all, and when Alfred went off to a table on the other side of the room, and began chopping away at the top of his great stick, she asked Mrs. Jackson to let her leave the table and join him, although poor Mrs. Jackson was thereby left to finish a whole round of buttered toast by herself.

"Alfred," said Margaret suddenly, after she had stood by her brother in silence for a minute or two, "do you know that Cousin Maria says that you are going back to school next week?"

"Then Cousin Maria may just mind her own concerns," said Alfred. "What in the world does she know about the matter?"

"But Aunt Milgate says that papa said so too, Alfred," added Margaret timidly.

"Oh, she did, did she?" answered the former, cutting away at the stick as if he could not possibly attend to anything else.

"But, Alfred," continued Margaret, after a pause, "do you think that papa really means you to go back? I did so hope that you were going to stay at home."

"Oh, patience, Margaret!" exclaimed her brother; "how you do keep on bothering! Of course I shall settle all about it with my father in time, but what's the good of worrying him so long beforehand?"

This sounded so grand—especially those dignified words, my father"—and so very considerate, too, of Mr. Hannington's comfort, that Margaret was quite silenced, and tried to think that it would be all quite right in the end, for her confidence in her brother was as strong as it



could be. She looked up to him as being as much wiser as he was older than herself, and his positive way of speaking increased her submission. In her great love for him it was impossible for her to see his faults, and to break her perfect trust in him would be almost to break her heart. And yet, alas, that perfect trust must be broken, and that sorrow suffered !

" Alfred," said Mr. Hannington at dessert that evening, " I have been looking at Mr. Ball's letter, and I see that you are to go to school on the fifteenth, that is, I believe, next Friday week."

Margaret's quick anxious eyes were raised to her brother's face, which looked very red as it was bent over his plate of walnuts.

" Yes, Sir," he muttered, in a voice that was extremely different from his way of addressing Will Vass or the pigs. " Yes, Sir; but I have been thinking that as old Ball cannot teach me anything, it would be a great deal better for me to stay at home."

" What are you saying?" asked Mr. Hannington, with a sharp look coming into his eyes that made Margaret tremble.

Alfred repeated the words, and feeling that he was in for the struggle, he added, " And what is more, I should not learn any Latin and Greek if I were to stay at that horrid place till Doomsday."

" Be silent, Sir," said Mr. Hannington, thoroughly roused from his usual absent manner, and speaking in a voice which must be attended to. " Be silent, Sir, and never let me hear any more of

that nonsense. You will be ready to return to school on Friday week, as I said; and if you don't take pains with your lessons when you are there, it will be the worse for you."

The walnuts were finished in dead silence after that; and the tears which blinded Margaret's eyes were kept back till they could be shed in the solitude of her little bed up-stairs. That vain hope which had stolen into her childish heart was all over now. Alfred must go. Poor Alfred! he must go to a place where he said he was half-starved, and could not learn his lessons; and what a long, long time it would be before he came home again! Perhaps he might really be starved to death, and never come home! Oh, if papa did but know that he said he sometimes went without his dinner for a week together because there was nothing fit to eat, surely he would not let him go back there! And Margaret worked herself up into thinking that the very next morning she would ask Mrs. Jackson to go down and tell "papa" all the whole truth, and then perhaps after all he might change his mind.

And in the consolation of this idea, little Margaret fell asleep at last. But when she talked to Mrs. Jackson about it as the latter was dressing her the next day, and Mrs. Jackson had inquired exactly what had passed down-stairs, she was not very ready to undertake the business.

"Most happy should I be, Miss Hannington, my dear, as you know, to do anything in the world to keep your dear brother at home; but

your papa having thought it good to fix the day and all for his going back to school, it might seem to him as if I was making objections to his intentions, which might naturally be displeasing. But if any opportunity should occur, Miss Hanington, which should make it convenient for me to mention the subject, you may depend upon my using all my poor exertions to give a bias in Master Alfred's favour."

This was very kind and civil certainly, yet Margaret could not feel much comforted by it. Her spirits were soon raised again, however, for when Alfred came into the room, and she told him what she had been asking Mrs. Jackson to do, he said there was not the least occasion for them to trouble themselves, for he was quite certain that something would happen to prevent his going back to school, and so he cared for nobody, no, not he; and Margaret was not to think a pinch more of the matter, any more than he should.

That day, as soon as Margaret came out after her lessons, Alfred proposed another excursion over the pig-sties into the barn; and when they were in the most dangerous part of their passage, Margaret, whom he had told to get on before, that he might see that she was safe, heard a sudden rush and a loud cry, followed by a chorus of squeaks and grunts, and turning her head as well as she could from the difficulty of her position, saw, to her horror, Alfred lying doubled up in the straw, a foot or two from the old sow, and a little pig just galloping over his shoulders.

"O Margaret, Margaret!" he screamed, in a half-suffocated voice, "come, come as fast as you can. I have broken my leg! I have broken my leg! Make haste, do!"

Poor little Margaret, in great distress, looked with a very white face from between the bars, feeling that she ought to try to jump down amongst the pigs, but in too much horror of that voracious sow to be able to do so. "O Alfred, I cannot come; indeed I cannot!" she cried in her turn. "The old sow will bite you, I know; but it is so high, and I am afraid to jump."

"I don't want you to jump down here, you goose," cried Alfred from his straw. "Get down into the stable, and run round and call Will Vass, and I won't let the old sow begin eating me till he comes if I can stop her. Make haste, for I cannot stir."

And great haste Margaret did make, tearing a great rent in her black frock in her descent from the manger, and screaming out, "Will Vass! Will Vass!" as soon as she found herself outside of the stable door, in a voice that would tell anyone who heard her that something terrible had happened. And fortunately, though Will Vass was not at hand, old Pike, though rather deaf, heard her directly, as he was crossing the yard with a truss of hay on his back, and stopping in his progress towards the stable, called out as she came in sight, "Hey, Missy, whatever is the matter now?"

"O Pike, Pike, run, run to the pig-sties in the farm-yard!" she said breathlessly. "Alfred

has broken his leg, and the old sow is killing him ! run, run, pray !”

She might as well have said, “run, run,” to the truss of hay as to old Pike. His running days had long been over, for the rheumatism had got hold of his poor old legs, and reduced his best pace to a hobble. He set down the hay on the ground very deliberately, and, with the pitchfork in his hand, followed Margaret’s quick steps towards the farm-yard as fast as he conveniently could.

“Where are you, Alfred ?” the latter cried out as she plunged through the thick straw. “Old Pike is coming to help you. He will be here in a minute. Are you very much hurt now ?” But no sound could she hear in answer to her questions as she approached the pig-sty, except that fierce grunt which always made her tremble.

“Massy me, Missy !” exclaimed old Pike, hobbling up with his pitchfork, and opening the door of the sty to which Margaret pointed. “Massy me ! Master Alfred is never in here, surely !”

He might well doubt the fact, for no sign or sound could he see or hear, at first, of any other tenants of the sty than the disrespectful little pigs, who came cantering up to him, as much as to say, “Hollo ! old gentleman, what do you mean by walking in here without knocking at the door ?” The pig-sty, however, had a corner, and as old Pike passed it, he saw what he was looking for—Master Alfred himself, lying with his back against the palings, and the old sow lying exactly opposite, and apparently disposed

for nothing more than a little quiet conversation with her guest.

"Massy me, Master Alfred!" exclaimed old Pike once more. "You bean't hurt, be you? What do you stop here for, and how came you to come into the sty?"

"O Pike, it's my leg, my leg!" cried Alfred, twitching up his left foot as if in great agony. "I fell down from the top, Pike, you see, and I am bruised all over, and in such dreadful pain that I cannot stir."

"You be dirty all over, that I can see, at any rate," said old Pike rather unfeelingly. "But come along in, and let us see what Mrs. Jackson can do for you."

It would have been most convenient to Pike if he could have stuck his pitchfork into Alfred's jacket, and carried him home over his shoulders as he had carried the truss of hay; but not feeling certain whether that method would be convenient to Master Alfred, he had to help him up with his arms, which being even more rheumatic than his legs, it was some minutes before Margaret's eyes were rejoiced by seeing them both emerge from the pig-sty, Alfred with his head hanging awkwardly over old Pike's back, and giving a loud scream at every other step. It seemed to Margaret as if they never should get to the house. It was a terrible little journey. Old Pike hobbling so slowly, and Alfred uttering those horrible screams! And then what a commotion there was when they reached the kitchen door, and old Pike said how he was bringing him in with a broken leg—how Charlotte started

back from the great black saucepan and screamed for Sarah, and Sarah came running in and screamed for Mrs. Jackson—how they all met Mrs. Jackson at the foot of the back stairs, and how then there seemed such a confusion of words, and people, and screams—such talk about doctors, and fainting, and “Where is Master?” and “Dear me, who would have thought it?” that poor little Margaret grew more frightened and bewildered than ever.

In a very little time, however, something was done as well as a great deal said. Alfred was put into his bed, with urgent requests to be sure and keep as still as possible, for fear, as it seemed, of any more bones snapping before his papa and the doctor could come; Will Vass was sent off all about the village in search of Mr. Hannington, who, being at the time, as he very often was, at a small farm which he had on his hands about three miles from Stonesfield, was not likely to be found in a hurry; and Mrs. Jackson lighted a fire, and established herself with a little table and a look of the deepest anxiety in Alfred’s room, having first taken a little sal volatile, to compose her spirits after such a very distressing occurrence.

## CHAPTER VII.

## ALFRED'S SUFFERINGS.

It had been a troublesome business to get Alfred into his bed, as he declared that he was bruised all over, and could not bear to be touched, and of course he was unable to stand; and poor Margaret, who was bolted out of the room, and sat miserable and solitary on a door-step in the lobby, was more and more unhappy at every scream which reached her ears, and felt that if they had not gone over the pig-sties "on the sly," this terrible accident would not have happened. She was still more frightened when she went up to her brother's bed-side, and asked him in a low shaken voice how he was. His eyes were closed, and his face paler than usual, and though he did not seem to be asleep, he took no notice of her, and gave no answer to her question.

"Miss Margaret, I must request you not to disturb your poor brother," said Mrs. Jackson; "otherwise you will have to withdraw to the nursery distinctly. If he can get a little sleep, it will be the greatest mercy we can expect, and then Sarah can remain in attendance whilst I give you your dinner, which I have expressed my particular desire for Charlotte to hurry as much as possible."

Whether this particular desire was particularly attended to, may be doubtful. At any rate, the



time seemed long to Mrs. Jackson and to Margaret, for Alfred was so quiet that Margaret was afraid to move for fear of disturbing him ; and there was a dead silence in the room, until Alfred, who might also be finding it rather dull, suddenly opened his eyes, and exclaimed, in a tolerably strong clear voice, that he was desperately hungry, and must have some luncheon directly.

"Certainly, Master Alfred, certainly you shall have it," said Mrs. Jackson, bustling up with great alacrity. "Miss Margaret and I are just going to dinner, and I will see if it is not ready now ; and there is some nice rice-milk for her, which you cannot have anything better, I should consider, for your poor leg. And Sarah shall bring it you immediately."

And she was leaving the room in a great hurry as she spoke, when Alfred called her back. "I say, Mrs. Jackson," he said, "I feel so horribly weak, you cannot think. I am sure I shall faint away dead if I don't have some meat ; perhaps a little rice-milk might do my leg good afterwards, but I cannot fancy it at first. I am very weak indeed." And he threw his head languidly back on the pillow, as if the exertion of speaking had been very trying to him.

"Dear Alfred," said Margaret, when Mrs. Jackson, after promising that he should have whatever he wished for, had left the room, "I am afraid you are so very ill !"

"Yes, Margaret," said her brother feebly, "I am in a sad state. There is not the least chance of my being able to go back to school next week.

That is some comfort, is not it? Oh! my leg, my leg!" And he twitched himself up with one of those cries of pain which it grieved Margaret so much to hear.

"But this is much worse than going back to school," said Margaret, 'with tears in her eyes. "O Alfred, I wish we had never tried to get into the barn that dreadful way! I was afraid it was naughty, and now this comes of it:" and she could not prevent the sobs which rose in her heart from grief and self-reproach.

"Well, what is the use of crying about it?" said Alfred impatiently. "You are not hurt, at any rate, and you may say it is all my fault if you like, for they cannot punish me now I have got such a bad leg. I wish Mrs. Jackson would be quick with my dinner, for I know papa will be coming in, and then ten to one whether I get it."

Happily Sarah appeared at that minute with a tray and a covered plate containing a good thick mutton-chop, and some potatoes, and an order from Mrs. Jackson for Margaret to come and have her dinner immediately. Very little, however, of her mutton-chop could Margaret swallow. She was too sorrowful to eat; while the poor invalid, on the contrary, was finishing his plateful with a very good appetite, and coaxing Sarah to run down and fetch him another mutton-chop without saying anything to anybody.

In the meantime Will Vass had returned to the house with the report that master was nowhere to be found about the premises, but Master Pike

skeleton apple-trees in the garden. Continually she turned her head towards the bed where Alfred lay, with his eyes shut, and his mouth a little open, in what seemed a kind of stupor. If he could but have spoken one word of kindness, what a comfort it would have been ! Did Aunt Milgate and Cousin Maria know what had happened ? she wondered. She could see the white chimneys of the rectory above the stables to the left, and half wished that she could go over there, for she was sure that her aunt would be very sorry ; but then she must tell all about going over the pig-sties, and if Cousin Maria were there, how should she ever be able to do that ? She did not mind Aunt Milgate, but Cousin Maria would think it so very naughty, and would say that it served Alfred right to have broken his leg. So Margaret, in spite of good kind Aunt Milgate, could not get much comfort from the white chimneys, and felt so cold and lonely, that at last she crept on tiptoe by Mrs. Jackson, who was sitting with her back to the window, and stood close to the fire to warm herself. She wanted to know if Mrs. Jackson thought Alfred so very ill, and whether the doctor and papa would soon be here, but she could not ask, and Mrs. Jackson could not see the fear with which her childish heart was filled, and did not, therefore, say anything to cheer her up.

Presently the creaking of the front door, and the rubbing of heavy shoes on the mat within, aroused them all, and Alfred at the same moment gave such a fearful cry, that Mrs. Jackson whisked

her scissors into the fender, as she hastily jumped up to see what was the matter.

"Oh, I am so dreadfully ill all over," he exclaimed, "and my leg is in such a horrid agony! Don't I look frightfully bad, Mrs. Jackson?"

His face was not pale now, but flushed and heated, and Mrs. Jackson, who thought it flattering to take that view of the subject, earnestly assured him that "such was the change for the worse in his appearance, that she could not positively say whether she should know him for the same young gentleman anywhere else." He seemed soothed by this remark, and Mrs. Jackson, hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, was just carefully smoothing his pillow when the door opened, and Mr. Hannington and Mr. Smith, the doctor, entered the room together.

Margaret, without waiting to be told, quietly slipped out as they came in, and wandered disconsolately about the house, finding the fire in the nursery gone out, and not knowing at all what to do with herself. There was a sound of stirring and talking in Alfred's room, and not liking to go very far away from it, she sat down on the lower flight of stairs, and leant her head against the heavy, dark, oaken banisters. Presently she saw a tall muffled figure crossing the dim hall windows opposite to her, and in another minute the inner door was opened, and her Cousin Maria, in an old grey cloak, with the hood thrown over her head, came into the house. "Oh, there you are, Margaret," she said, as she perceived the little girl sitting on the steps. "Well, what has happened? Your aunt is quite

in a fidget, so I came over to find out the truth. I hear that the doctor has been sent for, and Alfred has broken his leg from falling into the pig-sty, but of course that is not true; so now just tell me what *is* the matter?"

This was not a request very easily obeyed by poor little Margaret, and what with her grief at having to say that Alfred really had broken his leg, and her shame about the pig-sty excursion which caused the accident, it was some time before Miss Hannington understood her story. But when she did, she could not help being a little moved by Margaret's distress; so all her indignation was directed against Alfred, first for being so mischievous, and secondly for breaking his leg just as he was going to school.

"However," she added, "I shall stay and hear what Mr. Smith says, for there may not be any bone broken after all, and if it is only a sprain, there will not be the least occasion for his staying at home longer than before."

"But he cannot stand, Cousin Maria," said Margaret earnestly. "Mrs. Jackson said that he would have fallen several times when they were getting him into bed, only she prevented him."

"Cousin Maria" was fortunately prevented from expressing her contempt for Mrs. Jackson's opinion by the approach of Mr. Hannington and the doctor, who at that moment left Alfred's room, and came down-stairs together, Mr. Smith talking as he came along of "feverish symptoms," and "some slight internal injury."

"But you do not find any bones broken?" asked Miss Hannington, advancing to shake hands with her cousin.

"No," said Mr. Smith; "I consider that there is no appearance of any fracture whatever; but it is evident from the continual twitchings, and the severity of the pain when the leg is touched, and also from the very purple appearance of the skin, that some mischief has occurred which might become serious. But I recommend perfect quiet, and with a little care and treatment, I trust the young gentleman may in a few days be upon his legs again."

This hope, however, did not seem in the way to be realized. A few days passed, and the young gentleman was not upon his legs again. So far from it, that, in spite of all the care and treatment, he appeared to be getting worse rather than better. So severe at times was the pain he suffered, that his fits of screaming were terrible to hear, and Mrs. Jackson was "distinctly distressed to remark that they grew louder and longer every day." They generally came on very bad just before the doctor appeared, and when he came into the room he found Alfred lying back on the pillow, with his eyes shut and his mouth open, as if in a kind of stupor of exhaustion.

Mr. Hannington heard but little of these fits, for he happened to be out of the house when they occurred; but they frightened Margaret into tears and sobs, which, in spite of Mrs. Jackson's reproofs, she could not help, although being turned out of Alfred's room—which was the consequence of them—made her still more miserable. At times she was very happy there. In the intervals of his fits of pain, Master Alfred

enjoyed a good deal of comfort. He had an excellent appetite, and Mrs. Jackson was constantly sending orders to the kitchen for savoury dishes of pastry, which Charlotte and Sarah made their own remarks about as they executed them. A pack of cards had always been a delight to him, and endless were the games at "beggar my neighbour" which he and Margaret played, occasionally condescending to draughts or dominoes for a little variety. He had also the good fortune to sleep remarkably well, so that Mrs. Jackson, who undertook to watch over him during the night, but who, nevertheless, slept in the nursery as usual, enjoyed quite unbroken slumbers from the last inspection which she took of her patient at midnight, till her earliest visit to him in the morning.

One night, however, there was an interruption to this fortunate state of affairs. Master Alfred had a raging headache—whether from his leg, or from two large plum-dumplings which he had eaten for dinner, I cannot say, but it awoke him from his sleep at about three o'clock in the morning, and he immediately set up a series of screams of such aggravated violence, that no powers of slumber in the house could stand against them. Mr. Hannington roused himself with a kind of vague notion that "surely that must be Alfred screaming;" and as Alfred's door was open, and very near his own, he had every advantage in deciding the question one way or the other. And in a wonderfully short time for him he *had* decided, and was in his dressing-gown, and on his way to his son's bedside, where he

encountered Mrs. Jackson, twisted up very tight in curl-papers about the head, and shawls about the shoulders, whilst a little white figure, which he did not see, was standing at the half-open door of the dark lobby a little way off.

"O Sir," cried Mrs. Jackson, "don't alarm yourself, Sir, I beg of you. It grieves me indeed to see you out in the cold distinctly. Yes, indeed, Master Alfred's sufferings are great, but I am used to it, Sir, and am always ready to fly to him at any midnight hour. What is it, Sir?" she continued, addressing Master Alfred in her most soothing voice. "Here is your good papa, who has been awoken by your afflicting cries, which I am sure will grieve you, so I hope now your poor leg will be more comfortable."

The words had scarcely passed her lips, when an awful cry, that was something between a howl and a shriek, broke from the patient; he tossed his arms wildly upwards, his eyes rolled, and even his legs, so far from being more composed, appeared to be in strong convulsions. Three little screams escaped from Mrs. Jackson at this terrible sight, but immediately recovering her presence of mind, she implored Mr. Hannington, who looked quite bewildered, to seize upon Master Alfred's legs, whilst she subdued his arms, and between them she did not doubt that they should be equal to the dreadful occasion, although if Sarah and Charlotte had been on the spot, instead of presuming to sleep through all calls and circumstances, it might have been better. If Mr. Hannington, however, was equal to the occasion, it was not in the way that Mrs.



Jackson kindly pointed out. Instead of making any attempt upon Alfred's excited legs, he walked to the wash-hand-stand, and fetching thence a large jug full of cold water, was just beginning to pour a cooling stream upon the patient's head, when all of a sudden the convulsions entirely ceased, and he lay perfectly still, without any cry or movement.

"Oh, pray, Sir," began Mrs. Jackson, "remember the pillow and the clothes."

But Mr. Hannington considerably stopped the cold-water application as soon as he saw the change, only quietly observing as he stood with the jug in his hand, "I am very glad I recollected it. Now I can go on again if he stirs." But Alfred did not show any signs of stirring; on the contrary, as his eyes were fast closed, and his breathing regular, he appeared after a few minutes to have fallen asleep; so Mrs. Jackson succeeded in persuading Mr. Hannington to return to rest again, declaring that nothing should induce her to leave the young gentleman's bedside before the morning, and he would be within hearing should that frightful scene come on again, which, however, she presumed to trust might not be the case.

It was a cold night, freezing sharply, and the fire had long burnt out; so when Mrs. Jackson had trimmed up the lantern, and had sat huddled up in her shawls as warmly as she could for about a quarter of an hour, she began to feel so extremely chilly, that she could not presume to say what might not be the consequences if she remained out of her bed a moment longer, and if

*she* were to be laid up, what was to become of the family in this dispensation? So taking a last look at the invalid, who seemed as comfortable as she could wish, she made her way as noiselessly as she could across the lobby, sadly scared by fancying that there was a rustling sound in the nursery as she approached it.

"Miss Margaret, my dear, is that you?" she said, in a shaking voice, as she opened the door. "Are you asleep?"

Margaret had, indeed, only that moment jumped into her bed, having been startled from a second expedition to Alfred's door by Mrs. Jackson's approach.

"O Mrs. Jackson," she said, "I cannot sleep to-night. Is Alfred any better now, do you think? And won't those dreadful screams come back again?"

"No, my dear, not at present; and I must beg you, therefore, to lie still, and go to sleep instantly. I am just going to rest for a few minutes, and then return again, for if I don't snatch a moment's repose when it is granted me, no one can say how my poor strength is to be kept up, and then what will become of poor dear Master Alfred, or any of us?"

Almost as soon as she had finished speaking, Margaret heard that she was comfortably snatching her repose, and as it seemed likely to last for more than a moment, it was to be hoped that her poor strength would be quite restored by it.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A SUDDEN RECOVERY.

MARGARET could not sleep. She had been very much frightened, and she could not help the sad fancies that filled her weary head. There was Alfred lying in his room alone, very ill, and in pain, and with no one to speak to. Perhaps he might die before the morning. That thought was too terrible for her to bear, and slipping quietly from her bed, Margaret passed her little dressing-gown round her shoulders, stole bare-footed out into the dark lobby, and made her way along it to her brother's room. Mrs. Jackson had left the lantern on the table; and as Margaret crept to the side of the bed, she saw by its light that Alfred was asleep. It was only a doze, however, for he opened his eyes after a minute or two, and exclaimed, at the sight of his sister, "Why, Margaret, what is the matter? You look as white as a ghost!"

"O Alfred," she cried, "I have been so frightened!" and then her voice failed, and the grief and terror she had felt drew from her shut-up heart a long deep sob, which ended in a burst of tears.

It was a sight which Alfred particularly disliked, and which tried his temper more than anything. "What in the world is there to cry about, Madge?" he said impatiently. "You wanted me

not to go to school, and I am not going, and now you are not satisfied. What a silly unreasonable child you are!"

Margaret's love for her brother was so deep that it was not in his power to make her angry; but she looked at him with sorrow and pity in her soft dark eyes, and tried to stay her tears, as she said, "But, Alfred dear, you are so ill, and in such dreadful pain, I cannot bear to see it, and I am afraid that you will never get well again."

"Fiddlestick's end!" exclaimed Alfred. "Now don't set off sobbing again. I can get well whenever I like, you know that as well as I do; and if you make such a piece of work I *will* get well too, and go off to school at once, much as I hate it."

Margaret opened her eyes now as wide as could be, and they expressed perfect bewilderment.

Alfred broke into a forced laugh. "Why, it is a capital joke, is not it? It is jolly fun, I can tell you, taking them all in, and getting coddled up with no end of good things, and I don't mind keeping in, as there is nothing going on out of doors. And now the right time is gone by for going back to school, perhaps papa won't send me all this half, and so I need not lie still here with such a bad leg much longer."

"But, Alfred," said poor Margaret, more bewildered than ever, "I cannot understand what you mean. Is not your leg really so bad now? But, then, what made you so terribly ill to-night?"

"O Margaret," he answered, "you are a little simpleton, and no mistake. There is just about as much the matter with my leg as there is with

yours, though I pinched it pretty hard, I can tell you, to make it look blue when the doctor came. And to think of his looking so solemn over it, and Jackson with her flannels and lotions! I wonder how I could get through it all so cleverly. But I say, Margaret, why don't you go and get into bed again, and go to sleep? You look as blue as butter-milk, and as cold as charity. And I feel rather sleepy again now, too, and you see you need not put yourself into a way on my account. I had a headache just now, but it is gone, and I am altogether pretty comfortable just at present."

But Margaret did not go, but stood trembling and silent by the bed-side. At last the truth came clearly into her mind. Alfred had deceived them all, and his bad leg was all a trick to keep him from going to school. How the many daily and continual falsehoods that he must have told rose to her thoughts, and seemed to freeze her heart within her! She knelt down beside the bed, for her knees were shaking, and putting her head near her brother's pillow, she whispered, in a voice that was scarcely audible, "But, Alfred, is it right to pretend what is not true, and to deceive papa and everybody? Surely it makes you very unhappy to do that, does it not, Alfred dear?"

"Oh, well," said Alfred, much provoked; "if it makes *you* unhappy, you had better go and tell papa the first thing in the morning, or now, this minute, if you like it better. I stayed at home to please you, so it will be very kind and grateful of you to turn against me; but pray do

just as you choose, only don't talk any more now, for I am much too sleepy to listen." And he turned himself round on the pillow, as if determined not to hear another word.

Margaret knew that it was useless to stay there any longer, and she stole silently back to the nursery, and covered herself up as warmly as she could in her own little bed, for she felt bitterly cold and miserable, and there seemed a pain in her heart which seemed to make sleep even more impossible for her than it had been before. Her thoughts were bewildered. Her childish mind was not able to consider clearly what had passed, but she had a sensation as if she had been holding on to something which had suddenly given way, and she was falling, falling into some great darkness, where she could see and cling to nothing. Hers was not a selfish nature. It did not come first into her heart, as it would have done to some people in her case, that she had been ill-used, and deceived, and made to feel needless pain and sorrow. It was not Alfred's conduct to her that weighed her down so much; it was, though she did not know it, the sense of sin—the pain of losing all her hope and trust in him—the thought that he had wandered into ways of deceit, and felt no shame or sorrow for them. What was to be the end of it? And how should she pretend still to think that he was ill, and unable to move? Her head began to ache with the vain endeavour to understand it all, and to know what she ought to do; and clasping her little hands, she murmured, "Our Father which art in Heaven, look down

and pity me, and teach me to be good, for I am very weak and helpless;" and then her troubled mind felt more at rest, and as she lay very still with her eyes closed, a dreaming sleep for a time fell over her.

She woke, however, in the morning with a very aching head, and a heavy sense that something bad had happened. Her dull looks and silence at breakfast might have been observed by Mrs. Jackson if she had not been very intent on making some buttered toast for "the poor invalid," as she called Master Alfred; and also she thought that she might be able to swallow a morsel or so of it herself; but after the distressing night that she had had, it was with the greatest difficulty that she could bring herself to touch anything. Margaret did not ask to carry in Alfred's plate and tea-cup, as she usually did. She felt as if she would rather not go and see him; but Mrs. Jackson gave her no choice, but put the tea-cup into her hand, and told her to go on with it, and she would follow with the toast as soon as the plate was warm enough.

Alfred looked at his sister with a curious expression as she came into the room. "I say, Madge," he said, as she gave him the tea, "you don't believe what I said last night, do you?"

She fixed her sad eyes upon him, and answered gravely, "Yes, Alfred, of course I do."

"Well," he said, "I don't care a pinch whether you do or not: but, at any rate, I can tell you that I'm dreadfully ill this morning, worse than I have been at all. I feel exactly as if the least thing that vexed me would bring on the

most terrible attack in my head. "O Jackson," he continued, as Mrs. Jackson appeared with the rest of his breakfast, and began the most tender inquiries after his health, "O Jackson, I am in a very poor way indeed, threatened with fits again, and as weak as a wafer. I hope I may be able to finish my breakfast before I go off into convulsions, and perhaps I may feel better afterwards."

Margaret had slipped back to the nursery when Mrs. Jackson came in, not to finish her breakfast, for she did not feel inclined to eat anything, but to cower over the fender, and try to get some warmth into her cold hands and feet. She generally spent most part of the morning in Alfred's room, playing at cards or other games with him; but this morning she did not fancy playing at anything, she felt so very cold and wretched. Yet the brightest sunshine was glittering on the frosty window-panes, and when she went restlessly to the casement to look out, she saw an unclouded blue sky, and the hard white garden paths, and crusted apple-trees, gleaming with diamonds in the sharp bright frost.

"Margaret, my dear," said Mrs. Jackson, returning into the room after a time, "your dear brother being, I grieve to say, so precarious this morning, I shall not presume to leave him at all, and therefore I wish you to do some lessons by yourself for half an hour distinctly; and then, my dear, you will put on your bonnet and run out of doors, for your papa has just been asking me whether you were going out this fine morning, which I told him, of course, if he wished it,



when you had done your lessons ; and so you must go, and then you can come in and be comfortable, for it is terribly cold, to be sure," added Mrs. Jackson, raking up the fire with great energy, and ringing the bell with equal vigour on discovering an empty coal-scuttle.

Margaret went to get out her lesson-books without making any objection to Mrs. Jackson's orders. She was rather glad to do anything, and she sat down on a foot-stool by the fender, and began learning a lesson in geography. It never was difficult to her to learn by heart, but this morning she kept repeating over and over to herself the boundaries of Switzerland, and the names of the Swiss Cantons, and time after time, as she tried to say them without the book, she forgot one or other of the divisions. At last she put down the book in despair, and comforted herself by thinking that if Mrs. Jackson heard her say the lesson, which she very often neglected to do, the names would, perhaps, come back into her head at the right time. The lesson from "Magnall's Questions" was just as hard as the geography had been. Margaret's head ached sadly before it was learnt, and it was but a dull attention that she could give to the chapter in Mrs. Markham's "History of England," which she read to herself, although it was the reign of Henry V., and the glorious battle of Agincourt. Before it was finished Mrs. Jackson came in, and scolded her for not being gone out, and she had to put away her books, and button on her thick boots, and get ready as soon as she could. She was wandering disconsolately up and down

the gravel in front of the house a little while afterwards, when she heard the sound of voices in the lane apparently approaching the house, and in the clear frosty air she could distinguish both who were the speakers, and partly what was said. It was Mr. Smith, the doctor, the wheels of whose gig were almost inaudible on the beaten snow, whilst the voice of her Cousin Maria, who was walking by its side, sounded unusually loud and distinct. "It is perfectly incomprehensible to me," she said; "and, at any rate, there is no harm in giving you a hint, for Mr. Hannington leaves everything to Mrs. Jackson, and the end of it is, that Alfred is completely master, and can make them believe anything he chooses. He has always been mischievous, and as to his regard for truth, I only wish that I had the least dependence upon it."

"But there is no question about his having met with an accident, I suppose?" said Mr. Smith, doubtfully.

"Oh no," said Miss Hannington. "He fell through the pig-sty fast enough, but how much he hurt himself is another matter; and the accident happening just as he would have had to go to school, I confess seems to me suspicious."

They reached the sweep-gate as she spoke, and Margaret did not think of trying to get out of sight as she saw them coming.

"Oh, I am glad to see you out of doors, Margaret, it will do you good," said her cousin, more kindly than usual, as she looked at the child's pale face. "You have been stewed up in Alfred's room a great deal too much lately. I wish," she

added, "before you come in, you would run over and see your aunt for a few minutes. It is a long time since you have been there, and she will like to see you."

Margaret said Yes, she would ; but the thought of doing it distressed her. What could she say about Alfred if her aunt asked her questions, as she was sure to do ? However, she felt too dull and indifferent to care to stay out any longer, and when Mr. Smith and her cousin went into the house, she crossed over at once to the rectory, instead of turning to the yard to speak to Marmion, as she had half thought of doing before.

"My dear child," said her old aunt, grasping her little hands even more tightly than usual, "it gives me very great pleasure to see you again. But you are cold, my love. You don't look so well as usual," she continued, fixing her dim eyes on Margaret's wan face. "Go and stand close to the fire, my child, and take off your bonnet and handkerchief, and when you are quite warm you can come and tell me how Alfred is, for I have been grieved indeed to hear of his being so ill, and being laid up with such a sad leg. I said to your Cousin Maria only this morning, how distressed I was for him, and you too, my love ; and I was sorry, too, that you could not come and see me any more, Margaret, my dear, but it was quite right that you should stay with your brother, so that was a selfish thought, I dare say."

So the old lady went on in her low, slow voice, whilst her wrinkled fingers trembled over her knitting ; and Margaret stood silently on the rug,

close to the bright fire in the wide high grate ; and as she listened to her aunt's pitying words, her chilled heart seemed to melt within her, and turning round suddenly, she knelt down, and laid her head on the old lady's lap, and burst into a flood of tears. Her aunt was greatly distressed at the sight. Her fingers trembled more as she placed her knitting on the little round table beside her, and laying her hands upon the little girl's head, said gently, "My child, my dear child, don't grieve so sadly. You must pray to God to make your brother well again, and you know that He will help you out of all your trouble. Yes, Margaret, He will indeed. He helps us all, young and old, and comforts and pities us too. May He bless you, my dear little girl, and restore your dear brother to health again, and make you very happy."

She raised her hands from Margaret's head, and clasping them together, murmured some low words as if in prayer ; and Margaret checked her sobs, and standing up before her aunt with downcast eyes, and a slight flush upon her tearful face, said, "Aunt, I don't think that Alfred is very ill now." And then, as it came into her mind that even this was not the truth, if he had never been really ill at all, she stopped, and could scarcely keep back the swelling sobs that rose at the thought of her real cause for grief.

"But then, my dear," said her aunt, "if your brother is so much better, why should you be so unhappy? It makes me very glad to hear what you say, Margaret, and you must be very thankful, I am sure. What makes you cry so,

my child? I don't seem to understand it. Perhaps you are very cold and tired, and don't feel very well to-day. Ah! you have been shut up in your poor dear brother's room too much. I think I can give you something that will make you better, if your Cousin Maria has not taken the keys away."

And old Mrs. Milgate rose feebly from her chair, and after successfully groping in her daughter's work-basket, which stood on the table, for a bunch of little keys, she unlocked the door of a very small cupboard in the white wainscoted wall, and taking out some biscuits and wine, persuaded Margaret to drink half a glass of the latter. "And you had better go and warm yourself by running about a little, my dear," she said, as she put a second biscuit into Margaret's rather reluctant hand. "Fast little feet like yours will soon bring the colour into that white face, and when you come and see me next, I hope it will be a happy face too."

Margaret could not answer. Her throat seemed choked; and kissing her aunt very gently, she went out into the glittering sunshine, which could not cheer or warm her. She tried to run a little up and down the gravel because her aunt had recommended it, but her feet seemed chained to-day, and her hands soon became so benumbed, that she was creeping round to the garden door in order to slip into the house again, when she met her papa coming out.

"Oh, I am glad to see that you have been out, Margaret, my dear," he said, stooping down

and kissing her. "But your run has not brought a colour into your cheeks, either. Alfred, I am glad to tell you, is a great deal better, so Mr. Smith tells me at least, and he advises me to send him back to school directly ; so I am going to write about it to-day, and take him to-morrow if his leg is really all right again. But, Margaret," said Mr. Hannington, as if suddenly recollecting something, "I forgot that Mr. Smith does not wish Alfred to know anything about it, and particularly desired that it might not be mentioned before him ; so remember you are not to do so ; there is a good little girl. You will not forget what I say, will you ?"

Margaret looked up, and said, "No, Papa ;" but she was so astonished, that she hardly knew what she was promising. It seemed to her as if no power on earth would take Alfred to school to-morrow ; but she did not know, neither did Mr. Hannington, what had passed in Alfred's room that morning—how his deceitful cunning was outwitted, and how even the sagacious Mrs. Jackson had fallen unawares into a trap. Mr. Smith, being made suspicious by Miss Hannington's hints, had thoroughly and carefully examined his patient, and satisfied himself that there was nothing at all the matter with him or his limbs. However, so far from expressing this opinion, his face grew more and more solemn as he pinched and pulled the unhappy leg ; and at last, standing up stiff and straight by the bed-side, he pronounced that all remedies having failed, and the leg being evidently not likely to be of any more service, he should return the next day

with the proper instruments and cut it off. In vain Mrs. Jackson wrung her hands, and began a succession of small screams ; in vain Alfred turned white with terror at the announcement ; Mr. Smith took up his gloves, and said very coolly as he left the room, "I have only to beg, Mrs. Jackson, that nothing may be said to Mr. Hannington on the subject. I wish him to know nothing about it until the operation is over, as it would needlessly distress him ; and nothing but Master Hannington's recovering so suddenly as to be able to leave his bed and walk about as usual this very day, can prevent the necessity of my performing it." So saying, he went down-stairs ; and feeling quite sure of the effects of his own management, he advised Mr. Hannington, whom he found in the drawing-room, to take his son back to school the very next day.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE REAL SUFFERER.

MARGARET found the nursery empty when she went up-stairs ; and taking off her walking things, and fetching one of her favourite books, which was "The Fairchild Family," she sat down on a footstool close to the fire, and soon forgot all her

own troubles in the sad history of Emily and the pot of damascenes. But just as she had got to the part where Emily is sitting shivering with her miserable conscience and her wet pinafore, her reading was interrupted in an unexpected manner; for the door opened, and Alfred, with Mrs. Jackson beside him, holding one of his arms, walked into the room. He looked pale and out of humour; and twitched himself free from Mrs. Jackson's kind assistance rather roughly, as he said: "There now, you see I can walk very well by myself. My leg is quite well now, and there's an end of it, only I am dreadfully hungry; so I hope you and Margaret have got something nice for dinner, and are going to have it soon."

"Well, to be sure, Miss Hannington, my dear!" said Mrs. Jackson, busily putting an arm-chair close to the fire, and arranging an old flannel shawl over it. "Well, to be sure, is not it animating to see your dear brother so raised up! It seems quite, as one may say, to make one run all over with rejoicings. And so unprepared, too, when such dreadful blows were hanging over us; and worn out as I am with all my attendances, it would have been a miracle if I could have stood up much longer! But I cannot presume to say that you look much the happier for this merciful change either, Miss Margaret. Have not you a word to say to your dear brother, now that he is so suddenly relieved of his sad sufferings?"

Poor little Margaret tried to smile more brightly, and she really did feel glad to see Alfred up again; but there was no word or look



of kindness from him to brighten her heart ; and there was a burden on it which was almost more than her childish strength could bear, and which only one thing could remove. If Alfred would now have confessed his sad deceit, all would have been right again. If he would but tell papa, and say that he was very, very sorry, perhaps when papa knew how very unhappy it made him to think of going to school, he would forgive him, and would say that he might stay at home, if he would promise to take pains, and be very steady and industrious at his lessons. Oh ! if he would but speak !

Some faint hope that he might do so was mixed with her troubled thoughts, as she fixed her wistful eyes upon him ; and when he spoke carelessly, and almost roughly asked her to get the cards, and have a game at "beggar my neighbour" with him, instead of poking over her book in that stupid way, she agreed so gently and kindly, that even Alfred's ill-humour was almost softened. Yet, alas ! this faint hope was to be disappointed. After Margaret's dinner—which, however, was much more like Alfred's dinner than hers, for he ate a great deal, and she next to nothing—he took it into his head that he must go and have a talk with Will Vass ; and his talk lasted so long, that it was quite dark before he came in again. The afternoon seemed to Margaret like a long uncomfortable dream. She was too restless to read for many minutes together ; and her head sometimes felt so giddy, that the lines danced before her eyes. Several times she got up and went to the window ; and

when the afternoon was closing, watched the lines of dark rooks sweeping home through the clear, cold, white sunset. They seemed busy and happy together, and she was so dull and lonely. But that was not Margaret's thought. Perhaps she had no thought at all as she looked at them, but only a kind of feeling of solitariness. Her mind was full of but one thing, and that was Alfred's deceit. If he would only let her tell papa about it! She was sure that she should not be afraid, and papa would forgive him, because he spoke the truth. But what would become of her if he would neither confess himself, nor allow her to speak for him? Must she be deceitful too? And if he never was sorry for his sin, what would become of *him*? No one saw the look of half-bewildered terror that came into Margaret's face at this thought. No one knew the trouble that had fastened itself upon her childish heart. No one pitied or comforted her. One of the worst consequences that follows upon the evil conduct of anyone, whether children or grown-up people, is, that it makes others miserable, and hardens the heart into such cold selfishness, that those who cause the sorrow are the last to perceive or lament it. I am afraid there are, and have been, many careless brothers in the world, for whose wrong and idle and headstrong ways, their sisters' hearts have ached in secret many and many a time. Little Margaret's trial had come to her very early. Perhaps it was to teach her the lesson, which once learnt, would make her happier all her life long, and carry her safely through all its troubles. If

there was no one on earth who could help her; there was her Father in Heaven. There was her tender and merciful Saviour, to Whom she could look, and Who would come to her, and love her and strengthen her, and teach her how to pray for Alfred, too. But the lesson was not quite learnt yet.

She had to suffer the bitter disappointment of seeing Alfred really taken off to school the very next morning, without one word of confession or regret. He had pretended not to mind at all when Mr. Hannington told him in the evening that he was to go; and when Margaret had wished him good-night, and put her arms round his neck, and whispered, while the earnest tears sprang into her eyes, "O Alfred! pray, pray tell papa now!" he had pushed her off, and began whistling his favourite tune of "Heigh ho, says Rowley!" as if to show her that he felt quite at ease, and had nothing particular to trouble his conscience at present.

She sat sobbing in a corner of the stairs, close to the banisters, when the time came for him to go; whilst Mrs. Jackson was very busy giving directions about carrying down the black box, and dreadfully distressed to discover that Master Hannington would have to perform his journey in only one glove, as the other was not to be found by the united efforts of Charlotte, Sarah, and Will Vass, who, happening to be in the kitchen at the moment, was consulted on the subject.

"Make the boy come along, will you, Mrs. Jackson?" said Mr. Hannington, appearing im-

patiently in the door-way, with his great-coat on, and the whip in his hand. "What is he stopping for now? Never mind his gloves. If he loses them, he must go without."

"It is only one, Sir, which we cannot find it anywhere, I lament to say," said Mrs. Jackson; "but, Master Alfred, if you could bear it in mind to keep your left hand distinctly in your coat-pocket, it would not be so much noticed; and you will be careful of your leg, Master Alfred, and consider your unsteadiness, which cricket, and such kick-about pastimes, I should fear, would never be suitable. And I hope we shall have the comfort of seeing you again, Sir, at Easter; which will be a true pleasure, as your papa and dear Miss Margaret will participate."

"Good-by, Madge!" said Alfred, giving her a hasty kiss. "I say," he added in a whisper, "you will have me at home again long before Easter, see if you don't." And he jumped into the gig, and was gone; and Margaret stole back to the nursery, and had no voice to answer the long discourse which Mrs. Jackson immediately began over her own grief at Master Alfred's departure, her trials and fatigues during his illness, her great attachment to the family, which, though so recently planted in it, she felt herself growing to like wax or sticking-plaster, and the wonderful recovery from that frightful accident, which she really would not believe her own ears, when Master Alfred had first observed that he wished to get up, for he felt sure that he could walk now, if he tried.

It all fell without any clear meaning upon

Margaret's ears. The poor little girl was in truth too ill to attend to anything. And when the dinner came, and she could not swallow one mouthful of the food which Mrs. Jackson put upon her plate, but drank thirstily more than one of her little white cups full of water, even Mrs. Jackson's observation was aroused ; and she saw, for the first time, the heavy eyes, and the crimson spot upon one cheek, which showed that something serious was the matter. Yes, her anxiety to devote herself to the family was really to be tried now ! Margaret had been struck with a severe chill the night that she went into Alfred's room in consequence of his screams, and it had gradually brought on fever, which now was gaining the mastery over her. She slipped from her chair at the table when Mrs. Jackson asked her what was the matter that she could not eat her dinner ; and lying down upon the floor, with her head upon the latter's little footstool, answered her only by a moan of pain, while the tears of weakness stole down her hot cheeks.

To do Mrs. Jackson justice, she had really grown very fond of Margaret, though she had not a very kind manner to her. She was frightened now to see how very ill the poor child was ; and ringing for Sarah, consulted her quite humbly as to what was to be done, without making half the talk that she usually did about herself and her own opinion. Between them the best thing was done that could be. Margaret was put into a warm bath, and then laid in her little bed, where, in the comforting rest to her

aching head and weary limbs, in a few minutes she fell quietly asleep.

Sarah went down to the kitchen to gladden Charlotte with the good news, for they were both very sorry to see the poor little girl suffering; and her illness excited far more pity and interest than she would have guessed, for her gentle quiet ways, and her sad look sometimes, made everyone love and pity her. Yes, even Old Pike thought a great deal of "little Missy," and would have done anything in the world to please her; and Will Vass stood still, as he was bringing in a scuttle of cinders, and listened with quite a cast-down face whilst Charlotte and Sarah talked of the poor child not seeming to know where she was, and how she looked quite strange, and had asked for Master Alfred before they put her into bed; and they feared indeed that the poor little dear, so delicate as she was too, might never get over it. Mrs. Jackson had a confident expectation that Mr. Smith would come that day, remembering what he had said about Alfred's leg; but, as Sarah observed to Charlotte, you never could feel sure of a doctor till you saw him, so she should just run over to the Rectory and see what Miss Maria had to say about sending for him; and the old lady would be glad to hear about the little dear too. That is, Sarah would be glad to tell her, as people always do like to have something to tell, whether it be good or bad, to those who, they know, will be greatly interested in hearing it. So Sarah went; and the consequences were, that Mr. Smith was sent for forthwith—that poor Mrs.

Milgate was made sensible that her dear little niece was taken alarmingly ill—and that Cousin Maria, a few minutes afterwards, was rustling hastily into the nursery, to see, with her own eyes, what was really the matter with the poor child. Margaret slept still ; but her sunken face, pale as death, except for the crimson spot upon the cheek-bone, her white parted lips, and the low uneasy moan which she uttered from time to time, showed that her sleep was only the half-restless slumber of weakness. Some feeling came into Miss Hannington's heart as she stood and looked at her, which dimmed her eyes with tears, though she could not herself understand why they came.

"How long has she been complaining?" she asked Mrs. Jackson.

"Not at all, Miss Hannington, I can assure you, until this very afternoon, or I should have been the first to take notice of it, as you may presume," replied Mrs. Jackson, hastening to repel the slightest suspicion of negligence, and raising her voice high enough to break the slight sleep of the little invalid, who, opening her feverish eyes, fixed them upon her cousin as if in a dream, and whispered some words which Miss Hannington had to stoop down to understand.

"Help me! I am falling, falling!" murmured the half-conscious child ; and she stretched out her feeble little hands, as if seeking for something to grasp, and finding nothing.

Alas ! when Mr. Hannington returned from the station an hour afterwards, it was to find

that his little girl was too ill to hear or know him when he spoke to her, and to learn from Mr. Smith, who arrived just before him, that the fever, which must have been coming on for two or three days, had reached an alarming height, although he trusted that, with care, they should be able to conquer the unfavourable symptoms.

The poor father understood but too well that his child was in danger; and his sad spirit told him that he should surely lose her. Dear as she was to him, he knew that he had shown her but little of the affection which lay at the bottom of his silent heart. It was stirred deeply enough now; but it was too late. He could show her no kindness now. She was going back to her mother's love—to a home of peace and perfect happiness in Heaven—whilst his would be still more desolate. In his bitter grief he could not bear to stay beside his child, and witness the hopeless struggle; but he sternly impressed upon Mrs. Jackson, and upon Sarah also, the necessity of attending strictly to Mr. Smith's directions; and then went and shut himself up in his study, where he spent the next four days without stirring out of doors, and in far deeper misery than he would have felt had he been able to rouse himself to more active exertion.

And during those four days, there was no favourable turn that could give a ray of hope that the poor little sufferer's strength would hold out against the illness. Mr. Smith came every morning to find that his remedies had failed to subdue the fever, and that the delirium was undiminished. Sometimes she lay moaning, and



murmuring some words, as if she were falling from some dangerous place ; and sometimes she looked up wildly, and stretching her arms, called out, " Alfred ! Alfred ! come here ; I want you ! Alfred ! Alfred ! tell papa—pray, pray, tell papa ! " And then she sank back on the pillow, and seemed to fall into a stupor of weakness. Mr. Smith thought, and said to Mrs. Jackson, that there appeared to be some trouble on her mind regarding her brother ; but Mrs. Jackson assured him " such could never be the case, she being particularly fond of the dear young gentleman, and both of them, indeed, such charming companions for each other, which she had often made the remark, it was delightful to observe. "

But the heavy days passed on, and still the cry for Alfred continued ; and Sarah, who waited upon her master in the study, carrying in the meals which he did not care to touch, and always taking the opportunity of giving him the tidings from the nursery, which he did not dare to ask for, at last took the liberty of informing him, that " in her opinion the poor darling never would recover unless Master Alfred was sent for home, for indeed it was piteous to hear her crying out in that way for a sight of him ; and to think that if she were taken away this very day, as Mrs. Jackson said she thought she could never last out another night at any rate "—and here poor Sarah's voice was broken by a sob—" she would never see his face again on earth. "

Mr. Hannington answered never a word ; but that afternoon Old Pike drove off in the old gig, nobody knew where, for he was not a man of

many words, and it was only concluded that he was gone to some distance, by his particular directions to Will Vass about the management of the cows and pigs that evening.

"And how is she to-night, my dear?" said old Mrs. Milgate, when, in the dusk of the afternoon, her daughter returned from her daily visit to the sick-room.

"Going fast, Ma'am," answered Miss Hannington shortly, as she stood before the blazing fire warming her feet by turns.

"Going! did you say?" said the old lady; and, as she clasped her withered hands, a slow tear trickled down her cheek. "Going away from us so soon? But in a little while I shall see her again, if it please God to take me where she will be. His will be done. And how does her poor father bear his sorrow?"

"Does not say a word to anyone," replied Miss Hannington, "and never goes near the nursery. I spoke to him just now about Mrs. Jackson keeping up such a fire there—not that anything, as I was concerned to be obliged to say, could make any difference now—but he only covered his face with his hands, and gave me no answer whatever. Mr. Smith is expected again this evening. He maintains that the fever is not in the least infectious; and I hear that Alfred is sent for, which, I suppose, is Mrs. Jackson's officiousness; but it is of no use to attempt to do them any good, or give one's opinion about anything, so they must take the consequences!"

The old lady did not answer, and perhaps

did not hear, her daughter's observations. Her thoughts were rising in silent prayer to God for her dear little niece, as they had done constantly since the beginning of her illness—in prayer that she might be saved from suffering, and comforted and strengthened in her hour of need, for her Blessed Saviour's sake.

There was silence and sadness in Stonesfield House that evening. Everyone thought that the hours of the sick child were numbered; and as she lay in a stupor of weakness, with her eyes closed, and her soft death-like face, so white and still and innocent, turned upwards from the pillow, she did not see the grieving looks that were bent upon her, or know what kind hearts were aching to think of her. With noiseless feet and swimming tears, Charlotte and Sarah stole in by turns to stand beside her bed; whilst Mrs. Jackson, quite subdued and silent, sorrowfully prepared by the fire the slight nourishment which yet she had little hope of ever seeing swallowed. But in the study there was the deepest silence, as there was the deepest grief; for Mr. Hannington sat there alone, as usual, listening with strained ears to every sound, as if every moment expecting the approach of footsteps, and dreading to hear the words which he felt that they would bring—"Sir, your child is dead!"

And little Margaret's spirit was wandering all those hours in sadder dreams than I can speak of. There was a burden upon it when the illness overtook her, and a sense of sin, not of her own, but of her brother's, upon her conscience;

and under that burden she lay moaning unconsciously, sometimes moving her head to and fro uneasily, as if to escape from some fancied horror before her. Her voice was sunk to a whisper now from her weakness ; but still her white lips seemed to form Alfred's name, as if she would have cried out for him if she could. Mrs. Jackson placed a chair close to the bed-side, and sat bathing her forehead with vinegar ; and after a time an interval of rest seemed to fall upon her, and she lay quite quiet, almost as if asleep. Charlotte and Sarah were gone down to their supper ; and Mrs. Jackson's head, which had not been laid on a pillow for the last two nights, fell back on the chair in a weary doze. But it was soon broken ; for the door was opened by a hesitating hand, which fumbled uneasily at the lock ; and as she opened her eyes, she saw Alfred standing in his great-coat, with a half-stupified look, in the middle of the room.

"Hush ! Master Alfred, Sir ; your sister, dear Miss Margaret, is dying ! But I am glad to see you at home, Sir, and I hope I see you well," said Mrs. Jackson, not forgetting her politeness, even in her haste to tell the worst. "She will not know you, Master Alfred. Her senses will never come back to her in this world, and her strength is wasted to nothing. But she seems easier now than she has been, which, I grieve to say, is a sad token that the end cannot be distant."

Without a tear in his dull eyes, or the slightest sign of emotion, Alfred stood beside the bed of the sister whose little heart had beat so warmly

for him. Hers had been the sorrow for his evil conduct, and hers was the suffering; and yet would you have liked to have been in his place at that moment? Though there was no penitence, and no outward appearance of grief, would you have liked to have had that stony heart, so selfish and unsoftened, and yet heavy with a dead weight that nothing could lift or move? He did not stoop down to kiss—for perhaps the last time—the one companion, to lose whom should have seemed worse to him than to lose his own life; but Margaret knew him. She opened her eyes, and turned them suddenly to the side where he stood; and as she did so, she made an effort as if to raise herself up, and to throw her arms round his neck, and cried out, “Alfred! Alfred! are you come at last? Is it all forgiven?”

Her lips formed the words so imperfectly, and her voice was so low and broken, that Mrs. Jackson, though she was standing close to the pillow, did not distinctly catch them.

“Ah! I knew the poor little dear was longing to see you, Sir; and what a mercy indeed it is that she should acknowledge you, is it not? But what was she saying, Master Alfred?” she asked. “I seemed to understand something about forgiving, or a word of that nature.”

“How can I tell?” muttered Alfred. “She does not know what she says, I suppose, herself.”

“Alfred!” cried little Margaret again, looking at him with a fixed gaze, that seemed to fasten upon his soul, “Alfred! speak to me. I am so very ill! Is it all forgiven?”

Her voice was clearer, as she struggled more

and more to speak. He heard her perfectly, and so did Mrs. Jackson; but what could he say? The slumbering conscience and dull heart were stirred and shaken, and he was afraid to meet that earnest look. She turned it from him as if she understood his silence, and putting her thin colourless hands together, whispered a broken prayer—"O God, make him good, and me too, for our Saviour's sake!" Her eyes closed as she spoke, a sort of convulsion passed over her face, and Mrs. Jackson thought that she was dying.

"Master Alfred," she said, as she pushed him hastily aside, in order to give the needful attention to the little sufferer, "if there is anything that you would have wished to say, you should have said it at once! She cannot hear you now; and I shall be glad if you will just ring the bell for Sarah, and go down stairs, for it is of no good for you to be in this room any longer!"

He did as she bade him, going away with slow heavy feet, and a miserable load upon his mind, that seemed to drag upon him like an iron chain.

But his was not the only arrival at Stonesfield House that night. When Mr. Smith appeared, about ten o'clock, he was accompanied by Dr. Beevor, who, hearing of his niece's dangerous illness, had come down from London unexpectedly to see her, and had driven on from Churchbury with the former. He did not quite despair when he saw her; and indeed the fever had that day very much abated, the delirium had ceased

entirely for a time, and the danger now was principally from exhaustion ; he could therefore venture to give the stimulants which were so greatly needed. She knew her uncle, but was too weak to speak to him ; and when he persuaded Mr. Hannington to come up and see her, she moved her hand towards him, and something like a smile lighted her suffering face as he stooped down and kissed her tenderly, while heavy tears dimmed the eyes that had not shed one before.

Her kind uncle insisted on sitting up all that night, and tried to make everybody else go to bed and to sleep. He only succeeded, however, in both points with Mrs. Jackson. Charlotte and Sarah indeed went up-stairs, but they were much too anxious and sorrowful to have any power of sleeping that night. Mr. Hannington returned to his study ; and now he asked to be sent for if there was any change. Alfred had said that he was very tired, and had gone to his room before his uncle came. Was *he* likely to sleep, do you think ? The hours of darkness were dark indeed to him. He lay tossing upon his bed, determining that he *would* go to sleep—that whatever happened, there was no good in staying awake—that it was not his fault that Margaret was so ill : she would be a great deal better to-morrow, and then there would be an end of it. Yes, and if not, whispered the evil spirit, whom he had allowed to gain such a strong hold within him—if she should die to-night—then there will be nobody to tell of you ! But Margaret's wan face and gentle loving eyes

rose up before him, and whichever way he turned he seemed to see them. The looks which had made so little impression before, haunted and terrified him now; and he could not bear the punishment. He started up on his bed, as if to escape from the fancy: and the darkness terrified him more. Old as he was, and strong, and well in body, it frightened him to be alone. Alone, because he did not look for help in Heaven; and on earth he did not deserve that anyone should care for him! Horrible shadows seemed rustling about him; and in vain he lay down and covered his head with the bed-clothes, for even as he did so, he could not help believing that unseen hands were clutching them away from him. Far more miserable was his state than Margaret's now; for she lay still and at rest, too weak to sleep, but free from pain, and soothed by the sense of her uncle's presence, as well as benefited by the remedies which he had ordered. She could not speak; but now and then she tried to say her brother's name.

Suddenly the deep stillness around her was disturbed.

Wrapped in a blanket, and with eyes that seemed starting from his head, Alfred rushed into the room, and falling on his knees by her bed, covered his face with his hands, and cried out, "Margaret! Margaret! you are not going to die! I am sorry for what I did, Margaret, and I did not mean to be cross to you! Margaret, I don't mind what I say or do now, if you won't go away from me!"

Surely angels must have brought from Heaven



the smile that gleamed over Margaret's features, and must have sent into her heart such joy and gladness, as triumphed over all her illness and suffering. A new strength seemed given her. She lifted herself up, and threw her arms round Alfred's neck, and whispered, "O Alfred, I am so very, very happy!" But the poor little shaken body could not long support the effort of the spirit; and before Dr. Beevor could interfere to prevent Alfred's agitated words, or her answer, Margaret had fallen back in a fainting-fit, that Alfred thought was death; and there came, from the fear and distress of his heart at that moment, the first fervent prayer that he had ever offered in his life—not spoken, indeed, in words, but heard and received as the first breath of repentance always is in Heaven—"O God, save her, and have mercy upon me!"

The grey soft sky of Candlemas Day brightened over Stonesfield House the next morning; and with its westerly wind, from which the sharpness of winter had vanished, and the warm genial rain that fell lightly every now and then, seemed to resemble the gentler feelings that reigned within. Margaret was out of danger, sleeping with a sweet peaceful smile that promised a happy waking. Alfred had told all his story, first to Dr. Beevor, and afterwards to his father, not without great shame and difficulty, but with a heart so cheered and lightened when it was over, that he wondered himself why it had seemed so hard to him. Mrs. Jackson lifted up her hands and eyes, and wondered much more "how such ideas about his leg could ever have come into

Master Alfred's head, which, in her innocence, she should have gone through fire and water—as indeed in a manner she might say she had—rather than have suspected him of!” But when the whole truth reached Cousin Maria's ears, she was not the least astonished in the world, but declared, on the contrary, that she had all along believed that there was some deceit at the bottom of the matter. To old Mrs. Milgate, however, it was a great shock, and for a time seemed to distress her more even than Margaret's illness. “Dear, dear,” she kept on repeating, moving her fingers up and down as if in lamentation; “dear, dear, it grieves me indeed to hear it. But you are sure he is sorry, my dear? You said he was sorry, did not you? Oh dear, but it was very sad; and Margaret knew it, and could not tell her papa, or anyone!”

Dr. Beever was obliged to return to London within twenty-four hours, but he promised to come down again very soon; and if Margaret was well enough, he proposed to bring Rose with him, as she had not been strong, and wanted country air, and he thought it would be good for his little niece to have a companion. Alfred went back to school the very next day, and his much more affectionate good-by made amends to Margaret for his going; besides, that she was still too ill to play with him, and too weak to talk to him much. But her strength returned faster than could have been expected; and in a few days she was able to go down-stairs, and sit beside the dining-room fire with her doll and her papa; and the latter was so delighted to see her

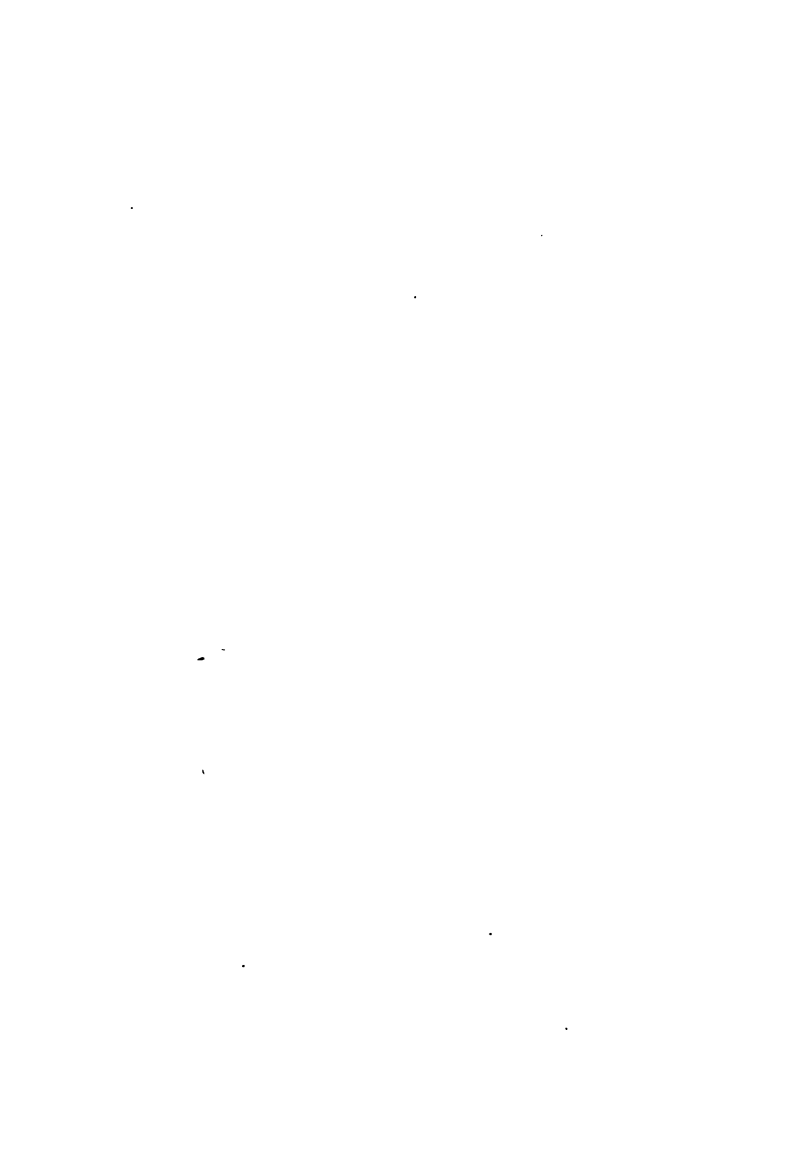
there, that he thought of all sorts of things to amuse her, and actually drove to Churchbury on purpose to buy her the prettiest new book that he could find in the shop there, as well as a handsome new draft-board, with which he taught her to play at drafts, and was soon himself beaten over and over again. Margaret did not at all want her Cousin Rosa to come. She felt very happy without her; but Dr. Beevor brought her nevertheless, and she stayed a month, and long before the end of it, the cousins were quite inseparable. Margaret clung to her with such warm affection, that the only difficulty was to part them again. But Rosa was obliged to go back to her lessons; and at Easter there came another change, which you may think was not a happy one, but which really turned out to be so to everybody concerned, excepting, perhaps, poor Mr. Hannington. Mrs. Jackson left Stonesfield House, and Margaret was sent to school. I do not know whether it was in consequence of anything that Dr. Beevor observed, or of Rosa's remarks on the subject of Margaret's learning when she went back to London; but there happened to be within a few doors of Dr. Beevor's house a very nice small school, where there were only six young ladies, and where Sophy and Marianne and Rosa went now three times a week to learn music and dancing from the masters who attended there; and as one of the six young ladies was going away, it came to pass that little Margaret, at Easter, as I have said, was sent up to take her place. No doubt she was greatly missed at home by others besides her papa. Marmion

could not for some days take any pleasure in gnawing his bones, and felt that life was a weariness. Old Pike discoursed with the pigs in a much less cheerful manner; and Will Vass, whose temper was faulty, expressed his feelings by extraordinary crossness to old Gypsey, when she did not get into the well-wheel fast enough to please him. But there was one who did not miss or mourn her long. By a sudden stroke her good old aunt was taken in the spring, without pain or suffering, to the better Home which she had long sought and patiently awaited; and when Margaret came again to Stonesfield for the holidays, the Rectory was deserted, and the kindness gone which had helped and comforted her when she most needed it. But the summer holidays were very bright and happy ones notwithstanding. Alfred had been much steadier at school, and had made fair, though not rapid, progress in his Latin; and now, though he was often tyrannical, he never meant to be wanting in affection to the sister whom he had learnt to love, not as she loved him, but as well as his more selfish nature permitted.

Whether, when fresh temptations assailed him, her heart might not have to ache over his wanderings from the path of truth and right, is more than I can say; but having been safely carried through this great and early trial, she would not fail to seek and find always the strength which would comfort her in every sorrow, and give her trust and confidence through every disappointed hope.



## **THE TWO TEMPTATIONS.**



## THE TWO TEMPTATIONS.

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"But deeper lurk all breasts within  
The secrets both of grace and sin;  
Each has his world of thought alone,  
To one dread Watcher only known."  
*Lyra Innocentium.*

ONE bitterly cold afternoon in January, I set off to make my way over the snow to a cottage at the farther end of my husband's parish, where there lived a poor old woman, to whom it had been my custom to pay a visit at least once a week. Poor Old Dame Whatts would miss the sight of me, I knew, and all the more for the dreary weather, and I should be glad to find that she was not suffering more than usual from the pinching cold; so I determined to undertake the walk, though I was not certain of being able to reach my journey's end.

Three weeks ago we had had such a fall of snow, that our lane had been quite blocked up, and impassable. The butcher, in a daring at-



tempt to reach our village in his cart, had been overturned, nearly buried in the snow, and unable to get any help for three or four hours. The postman had to make his way across the open country how he could, avoiding the deep drifts, and making a strange track over fields and hedges, which in open weather would have puzzled a fox-hunter. The poor little blue-faced children came dropping into school by twos and threes half-an-hour or more behind their time, according to the distance of their homes; but it was only for the first day or two after the fall that any of them stayed away entirely. I encouraged Mrs. Street to keep up a good fire, and I think they were warmer and happier in the school than they would have been cowering over the smouldering sticks, and huddling round the hearth in the way of the tea-kettle, or pot of potatoes, at home.

It was a hard time for the poor indeed, and as Mr. Burford and I trudged about the parish, inquiring what was most wanted in this cottage and in that, and helping as much as we could, it made our hearts ache to see all the hardships and suffering that we *could* not help, and we longed for the milder weather that would make the extra warmth, food, and clothing, which the poor cannot provide for themselves, less necessary. Ours was a large parish, and there were not many in it who had anything to give; none, indeed, except the farmers, and Sir Robert and Lady Wright, at the Great House; but they gave liberally coals, flannel, beef, and mutton, at Christmas regularly; and now they, as well as

our two farmers, Mr. Chilton and Mr. Downes, were most willing to help us in an extra distribution of fuel on account of the prolonged severity of the season. We had no reason to complain of want of charity in our neighbours, and every hearth in the parish could at least show a cheerful blaze at times, and every shivering body feel the gladness of added warmth, even in the cottages where the many half-clad hungry children made the cold and destitution most severely felt. Poor Old Master Hance, who had been lingering long, was "taken for death"\* on one of those freezing nights, and in burying him under the snow in the churchyard, Mr. Burford caught so heavy a cold, that he was obliged to keep himself warm within doors for several days, that he might not be prevented from doing his duty on Sunday. He did not give me much encouragement in my attempt to go and see poor Dame Whatts, and I believe he thought that there was about as much chance of my walking to the Land's End as to Sparrow Lane. However, I did not mean to be easily daunted, and made up my mind to wet ankles, and some rather hard walking. The lane between the village and the Great House had been cut through wherever the snow had drifted. Irregular walls of dazzling white, with long glistening icicles depending from the upper masses, higher than my head, were on either side of me as I passed with a quick foot over the hard, rough-edged road. The sun was dazzling bright, and, sheltered from the biting north-east wind, the

\* A Hampshire phrase.

air felt so warm, that this new, white, fairy world seemed to me for a little while as pleasant as it was beautiful. But I knew that all my way could not be so easy. By-and-by I had to leave the cleared and beaten lane, and in the teeth of the wind follow an open path across some fields, where too few feet had passed before to beat the snow where it was shallow, and where I had sometimes a little trouble in wading through it when it was deep. In spite of difficulties, however, Sparrow Lane was reached, and I was very glad to sit half an hour with Dame Whatts, and very glad that I had come to see her, for she was but poorly, and wanted a little help from my medicine chest, which I promised to send her that very afternoon by her granddaughter Sally, if I was at home again in time before she started from school. But Mrs. Whatts reminded me that it was Saturday, which I had carelessly forgotten at the moment I spoke, and she said that Sally would have been at home by this time to-day, only she was gone up with the rest to the Great House, where, as I knew, soup was given away every Saturday afternoon to as many as liked to come after it.

"'Tis very comforting, the soup is," said Old Dame Whatts. "It is not wishy-washy stuff, you know, for there's a plenty of meat; and when we have put in the potatoes, it makes a good meal on Sunday for all of us, I can tell you, and seems to stop the cold in one's inside a bit."

"Lady Wright-will be very glad to hear that

you like it," I said; and I determined to tell the former Dame Whatts's opinion, for she had taken a great deal of pains to make her soup good, and was very much afraid that after all her poor neighbours did not think it much worth having.

My walk home was not very fatiguing, as I knew better where to place my steps; and I was ploughing silently along the south side of Sparrow Copse, when I heard voices on before me, and, turning the corner of the wood, what should I see but Sally Whatts and two other little girls, whose mothers lived in Sparrow Lane also, sitting on the snowy bank, and helping themselves to some fragments of meat which they were fishing out of the pitchers of soup that they were carrying home from the Great House. They were so busy dipping in their fingers and eating, that they did not see me at first, and when they did, there was, as you may guess, such a starting and jumping up, that it was a wonder that all three of the pitchers were not upset on the spot. Poor little children! I was sorry for them; they looked so cold, so hungry, and so ashamed.

"O Sally," I said, "you are the eldest. You should not have done this, or let the others do it. I thought you were quite to be trusted."

"I never did it before," Sally answered, and she began to sob. "But we was so cold, and Mary Smith said she was so hungry."

The bitter wind came sweeping against us, and made us shiver as we stood. The children's scanty grey cloaks seemed scarcely to protect

them, and their arms and hands were purple. I could not help thinking what a temptation it was for them to resist, with their long walk in the keen air, and their craving for food, and the certainty, as they had good reason to think, of never being found out. They were but young children; and if, as I believe, they had carried their pitchers over the solitary fields untouched every other Saturday, and never fallen into the temptation but this once, I think I was not wrong in forgiving them, and promising to say nothing of this sad transgression to anyone, if they would try never to be guilty of the same again.

Three days after this little expedition of mine to Sparrow Lane, I set off to take another walk, though a much shorter one, and to pay a very different sort of visit. I wanted to speak to Lady Wright about some parish matters, in which she was always ready to lend a helping hand, or rather a helping purse; and so about an hour and a half after breakfast, when I had attended to all my household concerns, I went. My walk was not nearly so pleasant as the Saturday one; though there had been the usual sharp frost in the night, the air was now thick, the sky overcast, and the ground in the sheltered places beginning to give, at this warmest time in the day, so that my feet were soon heavily clogged with clods of earth and snow. However, my way lay all along the lane till I reached the coach-road gate; and within that the gravel had been so frequently cleared and swept, that walking was very easy. The Great House seemed full of life and warmth. A log fire was crack-

ling in the hall, where two of the elder children were playing at battledore and shuttlecock, the governess being away, and the boys at home for the holidays. It was some time since I had seen Lady Wright, excepting at church, partly because of the weather, and partly because Mr. Burford's attack of severe cold had given me more to do than usual. We sat over the drawing-room fire, settling all the affairs of the parish very wisely, as we thought, without doubt, and not at all heeded by the two guests, who were very busy over their own work and their own talk at the centre table, or by the various children, who burst in suddenly at different times to look after one another, or carry off something that they wanted.

I was surprised when the luncheon-bell rang, having no idea that it was so late; but Lady Wright would not let me run away then, and down we all went together to the ample, cheerful family meal in the dining-room. There being no school-room at present, we had the company of all the children, rising from six years old; the two boys from Harrow, of course, and their three sisters, who looked all very merry and rosy, and as if they had been spending the holiday morning very much to their own satisfaction.

A good deal of underhand laughing, and at times a burst of rather tempestuous talking, went on during dinner; and good-natured Lady Wright did not make much attempt to keep order, but apologized to me for the absence of the governess, and busied herself in giving

plentiful helps of the good things at her end of the table. Such a merry party was a pleasant change to me, and needed no apology at all. I knew it was possible to be merry and good, and though I heard one or two over-sharp words, I did not suspect my young friends of having quite forgotten this either.

"What! another help!" exclaimed Lady Wright, when one of the little girls' plates was brought a second time for the rice and preserve that she was dispensing. "You may have one of those tartlets in the middle of the table instead, Anna, my love, if you like. I think they are made of strawberry. Do take one yourself, Mrs. Burford; you will find them very nice."

I took one myself accordingly; but Anna, though she looked doubtingly at the tempting little dainties, still preferred the top dish, and what with that and a hot apple tart and cream, I had no customers for the strawberry tartlets. The boys seemed in a violent hurry to finish their dinner, in order to be off to the ice somewhere or other; and as soon as grace was said, Lady Wright rose, and I went back with her and her guests to the drawing-room to fetch my cloak, which I had left there, for I knew it was quite time that I should be at home again. Of course there were a few last words to be said, and then I ran down-stairs without the ceremony of being shown out, intending, as I passed, just to slip into the dining-room for my gloves, which, as they were not with my cloak, I must have left there. There were voices in the room as I entered rather suddenly, and in a moment I

wished myself anywhere else, for I saw what I would much rather not have seen, and certainly was not intended to see. The three little girls were there; the eldest in the act of kneeling upon a chair, and taking one of the strawberry tartlets out of the dish, whilst Anna and her sister were standing near, each cramming one of them into their mouths as fast as they possibly could. They coloured crimson when they saw me, and I pitied them for the thrill of guilt and shame which my unexpected entrance cost them.

"I came in here to fetch my gloves," I said; "I think they must be under the table;" and going round to the other side, I soon found them lying on the floor. By that time, the children had recovered themselves a little, but said nothing; and as I was passing out, I laid my hand on Anna's shoulder, and said, "My dear child, you are vexed that I have seen this, and so am I; but you knew that you were in great danger of being found out, when you and your sisters gave way to the temptation, and yet you did not resist it. I will not tell your mamma, but remember, that if you have been really deceitful and greedy, the seeming so in my eyes is of much the least consequence in the matter." I went out as I spoke, and for the first moment or two was vexed with the idea that my words had been too harsh and severe; but as I walked quietly homewards, and reflected on what had passed, I was not sorry that I had spoken them. Surely, after the indulgence of an ample meal, it showed a sad want of steady principle and



conscientiousness to give way to what should have been such a small temptation. And then I thought of my three poor little hungry girls with their pitchers of soup; and as I compared the two cases, it struck me what a lesson of Christian charity might be learnt from the little history of these two temptations. I mean, how careful we should be, even where we know most, of forming a careless or hasty judgment, for after all, there is but One Who seeth the heart, and He only knows the strength of the temptation, the strength of the resistance, and the weakness of the fall. It ought to be a help and comfort to children, as it is to their elders, to feel in all their struggles, and in all their falls, that He is as merciful as He is just.

THE END.







